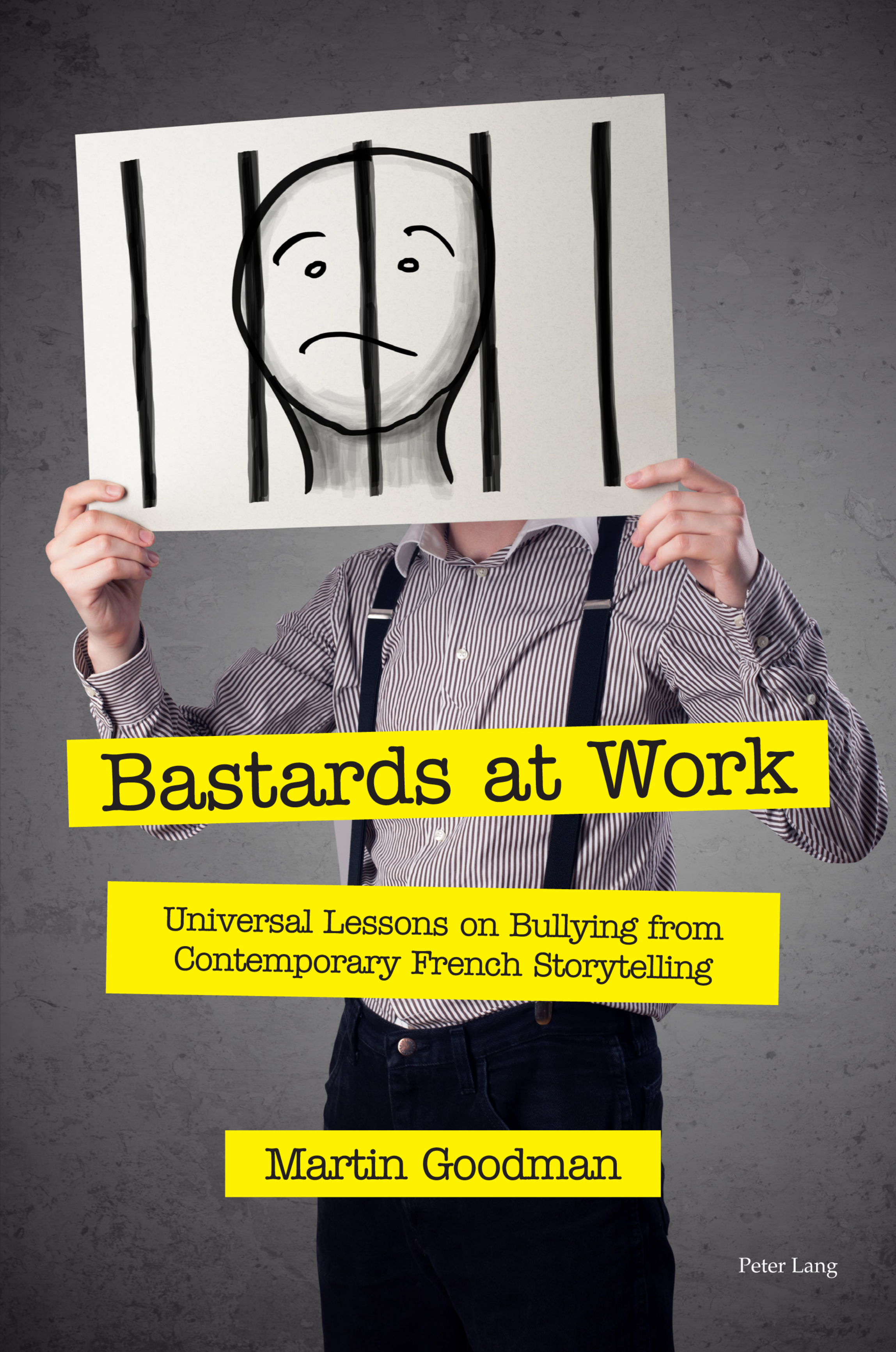

Bastards at Work

Universal Lessons on Bullying from Contemporary French Storytelling

Martin Goodman

Peter Lang

‘A fascinating and unique insight into the phenomenon of workplace bullying through the prism of contemporary French fiction. The book captures the individual suffering and power dynamics that characterise bullying in the workplace, while situating this within wider debates in the social sciences, psychology and cultural studies.’

– Sarah Waters, Professor of French Studies, University of Leeds

‘Drawing on a rich range of examples, Goodman deftly probes the stories told about workplace bullying not simply as a vital topic in its own right but as an important way to explore the effects of neoliberalism on working lives. Tremendously well informed, the book will be of interest to students of both French culture and contemporary labour practices.’

– Martin O’Shaughnessy, Professor, School of Arts & Humanities,
Nottingham Trent University

Bullying is a social phenomenon that defines the contemporary workplace with much of the emphasis on psychosocial rather than physical suffering. In France, workplace bullying has emerged as a subject of intense interest and controversy among scholars, policy makers and cultural producers – notably novelists, playwrights and film directors. It has a high public profile as reflected in specific legislation, a wealth of critical literature on workplace suffering, and an extensive range of novels, plays and films. This study contextualises and analyses this wave of fictional storytelling that has emerged in France since the year 2000. It critically analyses more than a dozen such stories with a view to determining how they reflect the lived experiences of workers. Each story is considered from the perspectives of critical commentaries and research from France and elsewhere, focusing on the disciplines of philosophy, psychology, medicine, anthropology, sociology, literary analysis, economics, law and business management. This study also examines how fiction reflects changes in the nature of the French economy, organisations and work itself since the advent of neoliberalism in the 1980s.

Martin Goodman is a Post Doctoral Research Fellow at the University of Leeds and a former HR director and management consultant. He has worked for major global businesses, government departments and international inter-governmental agencies. He holds a PhD in French (Leeds), Master’s degrees in Comparative Literature (London) and Management Studies (Durham), and a diplôme approfondi de langue française from the French Education Ministry. He is a member of the International Association on Workplace Bullying and Harassment (IAWBH) and a former Chartered Fellow of the UK’s Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD).

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The tradition recounted in several thousand years of literature does not lessen the shocking impact of modern encounters with cruelty represented by harassment. Like countless dramatists and novelists, I have always wondered at the brutality human beings can show to each other for no apparent reason. Yet knowing the reason can make the cruelty seem even more pathetic and tragic, especially when other, more humane ways to achieve the same ends are readily available.

– Carroll M. Brodsky, *The Harassed Worker*, p. vii

By the same author: *The Bastard in le Bureau: Universal Lessons from Three Modern French Plays*, Kindle Digital 2021

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Stories analysed with title translations in English

Stories analysed are printed below in italics.

All translations are my own unless otherwise noted.

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Corporate [Corporate] 77
Ressources humaines [Human Resources] 79
Au pays des [In Wonderland] 83
Boxon(s) jusqu'à n'en plus pouvoir [Let's Box to the Bitter End] 90

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Des clous [Nails] 120
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Potentiel du sinistre [Risk of Disaster] 149
Violence des Échanges en milieu tempéré [Work Hard, Play Hard] (published translation) 167
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Chapter 5 189
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La question humaine [Heartbeat Detector] (published translation of film adaptation) 214

Chapter 6 223
Trois huit [Night Shift] (published translation) 233
La loi du marché [The Measure of a Man] (published translation) 239
Hard copy [Hard Copy] 244

Abbreviations

AIDS	Acquired immune deficiency syndrome
BFI	British Film Institute
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
Dares	Direction de l'animation de la recherche, des études, et des statistiques, ministère du travail, France [Directorate for Research, Studies and Statistics, Ministry of Labour]
GPS	Global Positioning System
HR	Human Resources
HRM	Human Resource Management
HT	Human Tools – a fictional company that features in Tatiana Arfel's novel, *Des clous*.
INRS	L'institut national de recherche et de sécurite, France [National Institute for Research and Safety]
INSEE	L'Institut national de la statistique et des études économiques, France [National Institute for Statistics and Economic Studies]
MBO	Management by objectives
OECD	The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
ONS	Office for National Statistics, UK

Introduction

> Le harcèlement moral au travail se définit comme toute conduite abusive (geste, parole, comportement, attitude …) qui porte atteinte, par sa porte à répétition ou sa systématisation, à la dignité ou à l'intégrité psychique ou physique d'une personne, mettant en péril l'emploi de celle-ci ou dégradant le climat de travail.
>
> [Workplace bullying is defined as any abusive conduct (gesture, word, behaviour, attitude, etc) which, by its repeated or systematic nature, undermines the dignity or the psychological or physical integrity of a person, threatening that person's employment or degrading the working climate.][1]

This study is for anyone working in an organisation and for observers of organisational behaviour. It is written from the standpoint of someone who has spent over forty years working in some seventy complex organisations, variously as a researcher, management consultant, HR director and interim manager in the UK and internationally. Its modest ambition is to provide a fresh perspective on workplace bullying whose incidence reduces productivity (including the need to spend time on finding a replacement for an absent worker), causes much individual suffering and results in considerable cost to public health systems. It is not a manual on how to deal with workplace bullying or a sociological study of what it looks like. Neither is it critical of the value of HR texts and social science studies. Its modest ambitions are to answer the following five questions:

- Why is fictional storytelling about workplace bullying important?
- Why is it different from case studies in social science research?
- What's notable about the French experience?
- Why is it different from the Anglo-Saxon one?
- What's the value of these stories for bullied individuals, organisations and society as a whole?

---

[1] Marie-France Hirigoyen, *Malaise dans le travail, harcèlement moral – demêler le vrai du faux* (Paris: Syros, 2001).

In France, workplace bullying has emerged as a subject of intense interest and controversy among scholars, policy makers and cultural producers – notably novelists, playwrights and film directors. It has a high public profile as reflected in specific legislation, a wealth of critical literature on workplace suffering, and an extensive range of novels, plays and films. It is a social phenomenon that defines the contemporary workplace with much of the emphasis on psychosocial rather than physical suffering.[2] Bullying behaviour has a nebulous quality in the way it can manifest itself as, say, mocking, group exclusion, shaming, as well as managers allocating useless or impossible tasks to its targets. This study contends that storytelling has the capacity to make workplace bullying practices, generally hidden from public view, visible to the community at large in ways that specialist studies, often couched in technical terminology, seldom do – thus affording the issue broader currency.

The real extent of workplace bullying is unclear because national definitions vary and there is a considerable amount of 'self-labelling' by workers, that is, one worker may view a particular behaviour as a form of bullying, while another may not.[3]

---

[2] Alain Ehrenberg, *La société du malaise* (Paris: Odile Jacob, 2010), p. 19.

[3] This analysis also suggests that national culture may have a part to play in determining perceptions of what action does or does not constitute 'adverse social behaviour' (ASB) – a term which covers physical, mental and sexual 'violence and harassment'. The study cited here maintains that:

> '… the Baltic states, central and western European countries, and the Scandinavian countries are above the EU28 average of 14%. Austria, the Czech Republic and Finland show the highest percentages of workers reporting violence or harassment at the workplace (more than 20%), whereas in half of the eastern European countries (except Slovakia, Slovenia and the Baltic states) and in all the southern European countries, a smaller proportion of workers reports ASB (from 6% in Cyprus to 12% in Croatia).'

Mario Giaccone, Daniele Di Nunzio, Andrea Fromm, and Oscar Vargas, *Violence and Harassment in European Workplaces: Extent, Impacts and Policies* (Dublin: European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, 2015) Key Findings [online] <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/publications/report/2015/violence-and-harassment-in-european-workplaces-extent-impacts-and-policies> [accessed 03/10/2018].

The primary contemporary French influence here is the psychiatrist and psychotherapist Marie-France Hirigoyen. She provides a portmanteau definition as quoted in the epigraph to this Introduction, while French legislation takes a similar approach by declaring that:

> Aucun salarié ne doit subir les agissements répétés de harcèlement moral qui ont pour objet ou pour effet une dégradation de ses conditions de travail susceptible de porter atteinte à ses droits et à sa dignité, d'altérer sa santé physique ou mentale ou de compromettre son avenir professionnel.
>
> [No worker shall be subjected to repeated acts of psychological bullying whose purpose or effect is to degrade their working conditions and which are likely to infringe their rights and dignity, to alter their physical or mental health or to compromise their career future.][4]

This approach seems a perfectly appropriate starting point for a detailed examination of such a multi-headed concept, but it does raise a number of key practical issues including whether, because of lack of specificity in statute law, a worker who believes they have experienced bullying can have total confidence that a court will agree, before they initiate expensive legal proceedings.[5]

Olivier Saïssi provides some insights here with an examination of workplace bullying, using the organisational life cycle as a basis for classifying different types of bullying, simultaneously determining the roots of such behaviour and the position of the bully in the organisation.[6] Using eight case studies drawn from published sources, he argues that workplace bullying can be sparked equally by external and internal events. For instance, deregulation of air transport in Europe, which led to the part privatisation of Air France, exposed the airline for the first time to commercial pressures and the requirement to improve individual productivity for it to compete effectively in the private sector. On the other hand, bullying can also have its origins in the organisation itself, through, say, the threatening behaviour of shareholders, some or all senior executives, or indeed by the action of a single individual. The bully may see themselves as acting as a representative of the organisation, that is, where they perceive that behaving like a bully has become routinised in the organisation and is therefore part of the job. Saïssi labels this phenomenon 'institutional' bullying. Slavoj Žižek, in his critique of capitalism, calls this 'systemic violence'. Arguably, within the neoliberal workplace, such behaviour manifests itself as routinised and predominantly psychological bullying.[7][8]

---

[4] L.1152-1 du Code du travail as enacted in the Loi no. 2002-73 de modernisation sociale, 2002 [online] <https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichCode.do?cidTexte=LEGITEXT000006072050&dateTexte=20190327> [accessed 27/03/2019].

[5] My extensive research also suggests that there has been no holistic analysis to demonstrate how contemporary fictional stories, as reflected in cinema, literature and theatre, represent the issue of workplace bullying. Such research would, arguably, reveal the human perspective of workplace bullying, along with how this social phenomenon is played out on lived and subjective experiences of work.

[6] Olivier Saïssi, Le harcèlement sous ses différentes formes, source de fragilisation des salariés, in Pierre Bardelli and José Allouche, eds, *La souffrance au travail: quelle responsabilité de l'entreprise?* (Paris: Armand Colin, 2012), pp. 157–175. See also: Larry E. Greiner, "Evolution and Revolution as Organisations Grow," *Harvard Business Review*, May–June 1998 [online] <https://hbr.org/1998/05/evolution-and-revolution-as-organizations-grow> [accessed 18/01/2018].

Bullying may arise from enforced changes to a subgroup within an organisation, such as where members of a previously exclusive male vocational group, notably in the military and the prison system, put pressure on new female recruits, through, among other things, jokes, insults and rumours. Saïssi calls this 'cultural' bullying. A further variant, 'pathological' bullying, arises where an outsider is brought into an organisation because of their particular expertise and knowledge, while at the selection and recruitment stage, their 'capital psychiatrique', including any phobias and anxieties, are ignored – and once recruited their actual capabilities are disregarded too. A clear fictional representation of this type of bullying is to be found in Joëlle Delange's novel, *Le tragique du fou [Tragedy of a Madman]* where a gifted but intemperate surgeon is described by the target of his bullying in the following terms:

---

[7] Slavoj Žižek, *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections* (London: Profile Books, 2008).

[8] The term 'neoliberalism' is used throughout this book as a shorthand 'portmanteau' term to describe the form of late capitalism that has emerged since the 1980s and that has involved the growth of globally networked organisations whose operations are ultimately governed by movements in global financial markets. The use of this term is not meant to reflect any political philosophy based on views of privatisation of state-owned enterprises, deregulation or political confrontations with trade unions. Damien Cahill and Martijn Konings, *Neoliberalism* (London: Polity Press, 2017).

> Un orgueil démesuré et une mégalomanie pathologique dotaient cet être exceptionnel, d'une valeur inestimable, d'un pouvoir unique et spécial comme beaucoup d'hommes du même acabit.
>
> [Excessive pride and pathological megalomania endowed this exceptional being, of inestimable value, with a unique and special power like many men of the same ilk.][9]

Margarita Sanchez-Mazas maintains it is important to remember that there is a strong ethical dimension here – neatly captured in the French term for workplace bullying, 'le harcèlement moral'.[10]

In France, the phenomenon of workplace bullying has its origins in the fundamental restructuring and internationalisation of business from the 1980s, which followed the oil crises of the previous decade and the withdrawal of centralised State economic control over prices, pay and the monetary system, to prop up an economy that was being stripped of its industrial core by competition from developing economies. The French response was determined by European directives on privatisation and liberalisation from the 1990s onwards. It involved successive governments gradually adopting a macroeconomic policy that favoured private sector deregulation and globalisation and supported continuing European integration. This subverted the disruptive capabilities of the labour movement and dramatically reduced the stability of the employment relationship through the introduction of 'flexibility', that is, the proliferation of short-term employment contracts that enabled business to make structural changes, such as offshoring manufacturing and associated jobs, supported by new technology, as well as introducing Japanese inspired just-in-time and related techniques. While enabling organisations to respond more quickly to domestic and international market pressures, such practices have transferred risk and uncertainty to individual workers as well as deskilling many of them.[11]

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[9] Joëlle Delange, *Le tragique du fou* (Toulon: Les presses du midi, 2009), p. 36.

[10] Margarita Sanchez-Mazas, Enjeux éthiques et socialité au défi dans le phénomène du harcèlement psychologique, *Éthique publique*, Vol. 11, No. 2, 2009 [online] Vol. 11, n° 2 | 2009: *Le travail en crise* [accessed 10/01/2019].

Noelle Molé's study of the growth of workplace bullying in Italy echoes many elements of the French situation.[12] Her ethnographic research, based on extensive fieldwork in Padua, Italy, demonstrates how the rise of workplace bullying coincided with the unravelling of the country's traditional statutory labour protections and the growth of highly flexible short-term contract working and associated practices in the 1990s, creating existential uncertainties for workers about the new social and economic risks they had to face. As in France, where there has been medicalisation or psychologisation of bullying (see, for instance, the novel *Les visages écrasés*, critically analysed in Chapter 5), the Italian state has tended to deal with workplace bullying as an individual health issue by providing a range of assistance and support.[13] This has led to the creation of a specialist corps of lawyers and psychologists plus intense litigation with, like France, focus on medical treatment and financial compensation for the psychological suffering of workers, rather than addressing the root causes of the problem – the extreme methods employed by modern business to maximise organisational performance and control over workers.

Yves Clot and Michel Gollac have analysed such practices, including the case of a multinational engineering group that invested in new kiln technology to create metal casts from moulds that was supposed to eliminate the need for individuals to work in operating temperatures of more than 200°C. However, this turned out not to be the case in practice and local management judged that workers were still stirring molten metal with a rod only because they liked being 'à la gueule des fours' ['down the gullet of the furnace']. However, on further investigation, an ergonomics specialist confirmed workers' views that the business had recently purchased cheaper petroleum coke to heat the kiln. This regularly blocked the production process and so required manual intervention. The local director confirmed that he had no authority to revoke the decision to use the cheaper coke because the company's policy was to stick with the least expensive coke so as to improve financial results.[14]

---

[11] Vivien A. Schmidt, *From State to Market?* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1996), Introduction, pp. 1–12. See also: Jeremy Lane and Sarah Waters, "Work in Crisis: Film, Fiction and Theory," *Modern & Contemporary France*, no. 3 (2018): pp. 225–232.

[12] Noelle J. Molé, *Labor Disorders in Neoliberal Italy* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012).

[13] Marin Ledun, *Les visages écrasés* (Paris: Seuil, 2011).

Molé, as well as Thomas Périlleux and John Cultiaux, conclude that such incidences have led to the narrow focus on the problems faced by workers and specific remedial interventions, not the broader root economic causes of workplace bullying which is embedded in the very DNA of modern people management practices:

> … l'introduction de la dimension de la souffrance en politique empêcherait tout débat politique et pervertirait l'idéal de la solidarité.
>
> [… introducing the notion of suffering into politics would prevent any political debate and pervert the ideal of solidarity.][15]

For instance, this can be seen in Vincent de Gaulejac's analysis, which builds on Emile Durkheim's nineteenth-century notion of the division of labour and shows how the contemporary organisation of work often isolates individuals from their colleagues and nullifies the meaning of their tasks because they cannot see how these contribute to the work of others.[16] In short:

> Dans l'univers de la gestion, ce sens fondateur du lien social et de la capacité réflexive du sujet se perd.
>
> [In the world of management, this fundamental sense of the social link and the subject's reflective capacity, is lost.][17]

---

[14] Yves Clot and Michel Gollac, *Le travail: peut-il devenir supportable?* (Paris: Armand Colin, 2014, 2017), pp. 5–6.

[15] Thomas Périlleux and John Cultiaux, eds, *Destins politiques de la souffrance* (Toulouse: Éditions Erès, 2009), p. 15.

[16] Émile Durkheim, *De la division du travail social* (Charleston: Nabu Press, 2011) First published 1897.

[17] Vincent de Gaulejac, *La société malade de la gestion* (Paris: Éditions du seuil, 2005, 2009).

This study will critically examine the contemporary French experience of workplace bullying, that is, predominantly psychological coercion and agression directed at an individual that is driven either by economic considerations or some personal antipathy, rather than bullying or harassment on the basis of gender, race or disability.[18] The aim of this behaviour is to gain complete control over the way workers think and act in all aspects of their lives, not just at work.[19] This study makes extensive use of the research and career experience of several key therapeutic clinicians working in this field, notably Marie-France Hirigoyen (who kindly made herself available for interview) and Christophe Dejours. In addition, it is supported by rigorous analyses of the critical literature from a wide range of social scientists, including Pierre Bourdieu and Danièle Linhart, whose ideas and conclusions are based on extensive field research.[20] The specific focus of this study is on how this phenomenon is represented in fiction. It is not based on any new primary research into workers who say they have experienced bullying.

'Fiction' is defined here as stories of the imagination about lived experiences with a marked degree of verisimilitude or which exaggerate individual or collective behaviours to make a point. According to various estimates, since the year 2000, around 200 novels have been published in France, along with 70–80 films and around 30 plays about the workplace environment, many of which cover bullying.[21] Martin O'Shaughnessy sees this outpouring, particularly in cinema, as a reflection of the repeated and sporadic civil unrest in France against various government policies over many years, so that social groups, including workers who feel themselves inadequately represented by trade unions among others, have a voice.[22]

---

[18] This study excludes specific discussion of these various forms of discrimination because this is considered to be worthy of a separate study. It also excludes the phenomenon of cyber-bullying because it is not covered in the fifty or so stories examined for this book.

[19] Danièle Linhart, *La comédie humaine du travail* (Toulouse: Érès, 2015).

[20] Pierre Bourdieu, *La misère du monde* (Paris: Points, 2007).

[21] For instance, Bikialo and Engélibert estimate that in the period 2005–2009 alone more than sixty-five work-related novels were published in France, Stéphane Bikialo and Jean-Paul Engélibert, *Dire le travail* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2012), p. 37.

Fiction represents workplace bullying, not as an object of scientific study or statistical analysis, but as a shared human experience: a phenomenon that reflects the human condition within the contemporary political juncture. It also allows the reader/spectator to engage with a bullying situation as a 'complete experience', including from the perspectives of both bully and target, so that they can identify directly with the stories' protagonists, particularly by making mental connections between these stories and their own direct and indirect experiences, while at the same time not feeling threatened by the experience. Given the number of such stories, fiction may also serve to make society as a whole, including bullies themselves, more conscious of the crippling effects of corrosive behaviours that slowly and consistently gnaw away at individual confidence and capability and destroy the quality of their lives and those of others. As Dejours puts it:

> La souffrance s'accroît parce que ceux qui travaillent perdent progressivement l'espoir que la condition qui leur est faite aujourd'hui pourrait s'améliorer demain.
>
> [Suffering grows because workers gradually lose hope that the condition they are in today might improve tomorrow.][23]

It should also be noted that the main focus of analysis of stories here is the examination of recurrent thematic concerns across a range of narratives representing different cultural forms (novel, cinema, theatre) and that, due to the broad spectrum considered, questions of style and form and the choices relating to them have only been developed where they are of particular note or for illustrative purposes.

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[22] Martin O'Shaughnessy, *The New Face of Political Cinema, Commitment in French Film since 1955* (Oxford: Berghahn, 2007), p. 2.

[23] Christophe Dejours, *Souffrance en France* (Paris: Seuil, 2009), p. 16.

Overarching perspective

This study hypothesises that storytelling provides a counterweight to the tightly controlled internal messaging of organisations, through human resources' practices that tend to subvert the actions, language and, sometimes, the very thoughts of employees, so as to promote a sense of common interest.[24] In the following chapters the aim is to test this hypothesis in the context of critical literature, management texts, corporate policies and storytelling. The study asserts that these HR practices also tend to treat workers as commodities and necessarily disregard individuality to achieve their ends. Among other things, they incorporate pervasive standards against which individual performance can be measured. The study also contends that, as neoliberalism has evolved into larger more complex, globally networked organisations, focused on continuous performance improvement, the entire enterprise as an institution may well develop into a breeding ground for psychological violence, which becomes normalised and routine. So, the study seeks to demonstrate, through a robust examination of storytelling about workplace bullying in the neoliberal era, that one of the defining characteristics of neoliberal organisations is that they provide a context in which domination and inequality can flourish, particularly in the absence of senior positive role models to demonstrate otherwise.

This study does *not* argue, therefore, that the experience of working in neoliberal organisations is inevitably negative. Clearly, many workers enjoy their jobs and these provide their lives with meaning.[25] However, it is axiomatic that, in a study that focusses on the lived experiences of bullied workers and how these are reflected in fiction, the secondary sources used focus on the impact of destructive behaviour on workers, rather than on positive experiences of work. The study therefore examines the efforts and thoughts of clinicians and academics dedicated to understanding and helping to address the mental and psychological conditions of bullied workers. It scrutinises the works of critical theorists, some of whom, like Slovoj Žižek, write from the perspective of a particular political ideology, and overtly challenge generally accepted business practices to make their audiences reflect and reconsider established opinions. Moreover, the fiction critically analysed in this study overwhelmingly portrays negative experiences of the world of work. This is not just because this study is about the representation of bullying in stories. It is also because stories about happy workers are unlikely to attract writers, publishers, directors or audiences, because such tales tend to exclude tension and conflict, both essential ingredients of a compelling narrative.

---

[24] Dennis Mumby, *(Re)Branding the Dark Side: Communicative Capitalism and Neoliberalism, Keynote Address, International and Interdisciplinary Conference on Discourse and Communication in Professional Contexts – The Dark Side of Communication*, given at the University of Aalborg, Denmark on 14/8/2019 [unpublished]. Abstract [online] <https://easychair.org/smart-program/ICDC2019/2019-08-14.html#talk:108250> [accessed 05/06/2020].

[25] S. Antonio Ruiz Quintanilla, "Introduction: The Meaning of Work," *European Work and Organizational Psychologist* 1, no. 2–3 (1991): pp. 81–89 [online] <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/09602009108408514> [accessed 25/02/2020].

Marie-France Hirigoyen's 1998 study launched France's national debate on bullying and led to legislation in this area. It is clearly written, accessible and persuasive about the nature and extent of workplace bullying in France.[26] Among other things, it is supported by stories from her own patient case studies. These struck a chord with the public, the media and policy makers. In it she attacks new forms of work and growth of performance management arguing that:

> … tous les éléments humains sont génératrices de stress et créent ainsi les conditions favorables à l'expression de la perversité. L'entreprise peut elle-même devenir un système pervers lorsque la fin justife le moyens et qu'elle est prête à tout, y compris à détruire les individus pour parvenir à ses objectifs.
>
> [… everything humans do involves stress and so creates the conditions for the expression of perversity. Business itself can become a perverse system when the end justifies the means and it is ready to do anything, including destroying individuals, to achieve its objectives].[27]

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[26] Marie-France Hirigoyen, *Harcèlement moral, La violence perverse au quotidien* (Paris: Syros, 1998).

[27] Hirigoyen, *Harcèlement*, p. 81.

Hirigoyen also discusses the insidious nature of bullying, whose impact spreads and deepens through a series of small actions that do not directly cause physical damage but gradually eat away at the individual's sense of self, while:

> On revient chaque soir, usé, humilié, abîmé. Il est difficile de s'en remettre.
>
> [You return home every night, worn out, humiliated, damaged. It's difficult to recover.][28]

The other primary psychological contribution in this area has been from French psychiatrist and psychoanalyst, Christophe Dejours, whose research emphasises the deleterious nature of work organisation today in terms of the individual psychological suffering it causes.[29] Dejours attacks the conventional wisdom that organisational structures which tolerate a 'capitalism sauvage' represent an inevitable form of economic and social progress. His analysis is based on detailed clinical observations over many years in 'cliniques de travail' of individuals with work experience.[30] He maintains that modern organisations are broadly analogous to the large-scale systems of production which were developed by Nazis in concentration camps. Both systems, he asserts, require tacit worker consent to operate a totalitarian organisation based on domination and control and can lead to suicide.

Dejours therefore focusses on:

> les conduites humaines qui produisent cette machine de guerre et sur celles qui conduisent à consentir, voire à s'y soumettre.
>
> [… human behaviours that produce this war machine and those that lead to consent or even submission to it].[31]

Individual compliance is achieved in the modern organisation by progressive loss of hope by those who are being dominated. The more they give to be 'plus performant', the more intense the suffering to themselves and others.[32] There are resonances here of psychological contract theory, which distinguishes between the formal explicit contract for work, skills and time in return for financial reward, as opposed to the broader informal contract which binds the worker to the organisation through psychological ties, such as a sense of obligation, which may ultimately be stronger.[33] As Dejours points out, managers know that, while the formal contract and job description, with its key performance indicators and objectives, reflect one version of 'reality', in practice there is another everyday lived experience involving lack of management–worker consultation over sudden changes to working methods, unexpected operational breakdowns, shortages, inadequate staffing, and supervisors and middle managers routinely targeted by their superiors for failing to achieve objectives.[34]

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[28] Hirigoyen, *Harcèlement*, p. 56.

[29] Dejours, *Souffrance*.

[30] Dejours, *Souffrance*, p. iii.

[31] Dejours, *Souffrance*, p. 15.

This study contends that workplace bullying today principally manifests itself as a form of psychological aggression. Unlike physical violence, this can manifest itself as 'symbolic violence' perpetrated by individuals as:

> violence douce, invisible, méconnue comme telle, choisie autant que subie, celle de la confiance, de l'obligation, de la fidélité personnelle, de l'hospitalité, du don, de la dette, de la reconnaissance, de la piété, de toutes les vertus en un mot qu'honore la morale de l'honneur, s'impose comme le mode de domination le plus économique parce que le plus conforme à l'économie du système.
>
> [… soft violence, invisible, unrecognised as such, chosen as much as suffered, that of trust, of obligation, of personal fidelity, of hospitality, of gift, of debt, of gratitude, of piety, of all the virtues in a word which the morality of honour respects, imposes itself as the most economic form of domination because it is the most in keeping with the economy of the system].[35]

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[32] Dejours, *Souffrance*, p. 16.

[33] Denise M. Rousseau, "Psychological and Implied Contracts in Organisations," *Employee Responsibilities and Rights Journal* 2, no. 2 (01/1989) [online] <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/226857215_Psychological_and_Implied_Contracts_in_Organisations> [accessed 30/08/2018].

[34] Dejours, *Souffrance*, pp. 69–70.

[35] Pierre Bourdieu, *Les modes de domination*, Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales. Vol. 2, No. 2–3, juin 1976, pp. 122–132 [online] <https://www.persee.fr/doc/arss_0335-5322_1976_num_2_2_3456> [accessed 15/01/2019].

However, this study also contends that as neoliberalism has evolved into larger more complex, globally networked organisations, the entire enterprise as an institution, rather than a few individuals, can become responsible for psychological violence which becomes normalised and routine. This extreme form of bullying therefore constitutes systemic violence as can be witnessed, most notably, in the dramatic case of France Télécom.[36]

For the purposes of this study, neoliberalism will be examined from a micro-economic perspective, that is, by defining the neoliberal organisation as one where the market rather than the state is the dominant regulator, where management encourages individual workers to compete rather than collaborate with one another through the individualised nature of prevailing reward and performance management processes, where a substantial proportion of workers are without secure employment because they are on fixed-term contracts within the organisation or directly employed via a subcontractor, and where work performance is routinely and remotely monitored and measured, often through the use of technology. Further, in such organisations management habitually communicates through condensed, US-inspired business lingo, or 'novlangue', using such terms as

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[36] In 2008 and 2009 some thirty employees of the recently privatised France Télécom (now renamed Orange) were alleged to have committed suicide for work-related reasons, in what is now considered to be an environment of systemic violence. Following extensive publicity, a sustained outcry from unions and a lengthy legal process, on 20 December 2019 the French Supreme Court fined the company 75,000 euros, the maximum allowable under legislation on 'harcèlement moral' [workplace bullying] and condemned the company's three most senior executives each to twelve months' imprisonment and fines of 15,000 euros for creating a draconian programme of workforce reduction that led to these suicides. This decision is currently subject to appeal. The significance of this decision cannot be underestimated: it puts organisations and their senior executives on notice that the law will not tolerate such policies. It should be noted that, even in these circumstances, eight months of each prison sentence has been suspended. Eric Beynel and Claire Robert, *La raison des plus forts : Chroniques du procès France Télécom* (Ivry-Sur-Seine : Éditions de l'atelier, 2020). See also: L'Obs avec AFP, Suicides à France Télécom: prison ferme pour les ex-dirigeants, Le nouvel observateur, 20/12/2019, *nouvelobs.com* [online] <https://www.nouvelobs.com/social/20191220.OBS22604/dix-ans-apres-la-vague-de-suicides-a-france-telecom-l-heure-du-jugement.html> [accessed 12//01/2020].

‘shrinkage’ and ‘low-hanging fruit’, to convey messages that deliberately lack clarity while giving the impression of precision.[37]

This study deploys the conceptual framework set out in Figure 1 as a way of addressing this subject. As this figure indicates, the outer ring of this framework focuses on four main characteristics of neoliberalism that feature, separately if not in combination, in a significant number of stories. The middle ring specifies the principal actors in these stories, some of whom may also be the narrator in particular instances. The centre provides the medium within which the story unfolds. We can see how these rings are linked with reference, for instance, to Marin Ledun’s novel *Les visages écrasés*, in which the narrator is an occupational physician, employed within an organisation with a strong emphasis on performance measurement and control. The ‘target’ is not assigned a specific chapter because bullied individuals clearly feature in all the stories covered.

The issue of ‘measurement and control’ is analysed in particular in Chapter 3. The topic under analysis in this study is multifaceted. It draws on structured interviews with a leading psychologist and cultural producers, critical commentary and research from, among others, the disciplines of philosophy, psychology, medicine, anthropology, sociology, literary analysis, economics, law and business management.[38] Therefore, to minimise digressions and unnecessary repetition, it does not contain a single, consolidated literature review. Instead, the review of the critical literature, including associated research, runs through the entire study like a series of interwoven threads. In the words of Christine Susan Bruce, it provides both ‘process and product’ and helps frame the study, as well as contributing to the analysis of issues examined in each chapter in the expectation

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[37] Agnes Vandevelde-Rougale, *La novlangue managériale: Emprise et résistance* (Paris: Erès, 2017). The use of ‘novlangue’ is a recurrent theme throughout this book.

[38] Critical information sources also include networking with key delegates at the three-day annual conference of the International Association on Workplace Bullying and Harassment in Bordeaux in June 2018 and interviews in Paris in September 2018 with, among others, the psychologist and leading thinker, Marie-France Hirigoyen, the novelist, Thierry Beinstingel, the playwright and novelist, Isabelle Sorente.

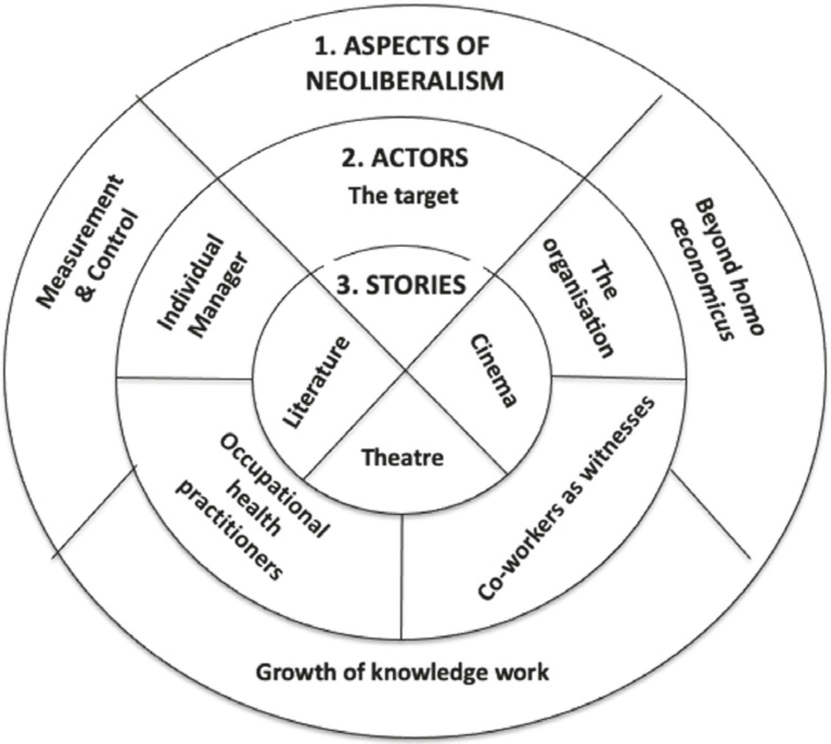
1. ASPECTS OF NEOLIBERALISM
Measurement & Control
Beyond homo œconomicus
Growth of knowledge work
2. ACTORS
The target
Individual Manager
The organisation
Occupational health practitioners
Co-workers as witnesses
3. STORIES
Literature
Cinema
Theatre

Figure 1. A conceptual framework for analysing storytelling

that this will contribute to critical scrutiny and synthesis of the arguments presented.[39]

Chapter 1 is contextual. It provides a detailed critical analysis of workplace bullying from a range of perspectives. It examines why, from a theoretical perspective, psychological bullying, as opposed to physical bullying, has come to the fore within neoliberal organisations. It also seeks to scrutinise specific characteristics of the economic and social influences that have led to the growth of contemporary fiction about work, and workplace bullying in France.

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[39] Christine Susan Bruce (1994), quoted in Roweena Murray, *How to Write a Thesis* (London: Open University Press/McGraw Hill, Education: 2017, Fourth edition), pp. 121–133.

This study critically analyses stories in theme-based clusters. These combinations are not intended to be definitive because each story covers several themes. However, the groupings do provide a pragmatic basis for addressing the issues under analysis.

As a supplement to the previous chapter, Chapter 2 scrutinises, with support of critical literature and management research, four key fictional stories in order to examine the many faces of systemic violence in cultural representation and demonstrate how such bullying saps individual resistance and creates profound despair. These are the films, *Corporate*, and *Ressources humaines* and the plays, *Au pays des*, and *Boxon(s) jusqu'à n'en plus pouvoir*.[40]

Chapter 3 focuses in depth on the individual psychological suffering created by the inherent conflict between neoliberalism's avaricious desire to regard workers narrowly as an economic resource, while workers themselves strive to retain their own identity and be treated as fully rounded social beings. This chapter critically analyses three stories: the novels, *Retour aux mots sauvages* and *Des clous*, and the play, *Les nouveaux barbares*.[41]

Through the lens of critical analysis, Chapter 4 examines the rise of knowledge management and knowledge work in the contemporary neoliberal economy where fiction illustrates how creative workers, whose jobs are content-rich, may be willing to subjugate themselves to neoliberalism in the mistaken belief that such jobs will lead to a fuller life. The stories critically analysed here are the novels *Potentiel du sinistre* and *L'homme qui aimait trop travailler*, and the film *Violence des échanges en milieu tempéré*.[42]

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[40] Dir. Nicolas Silhol, *Corporate*, Diaphana, 2017, Dir. Laurent Contet, *Ressources humaines*, France-télévisions distribution, 1999, Levey, *Au pays des* (2011), Stéphane Jaubertie, *Boxon(s) jusqu'à n'en plus pouvoir* (Montreuil: Éditions théâtrales, 2018) sixième mouvement, scène 1, pp. 77–82.

[41] Thierry Beinstingel, *Retour aux mots sauvages* (Paris: Fayard/ Le livre de poche, 2010), Tatiana Arfel, *Des clous* (Paris: José Corti, 2010), Frédéric El Kaïm, *Les nouveaux barbares* (unpublished, 2014).

[42] Thomas Coppey, *Potentiel du sinistre* (Arles: Actes sud, 2013), Alexandre Lacroix, *L'homme qui aimait trop travailler* (Paris: Flammarion, 2015), Dir. Jean-Marc Moutout, *Violence des échanges en milieu tempéré* (Melmedias, 2003).

Chapter 5 uses critical literature and fiction to scrutinise the role of in-house occupational therapists, that is, workplace physicians and psychologists, and how they encounter psychological violence directly and through the suffering of their patients and other workers. The stories examined here are the novels and film adaptations of *Les visages écrasés / Carole Matthieu* and *La question humaine*.[43]

Chapter 6 deals with complicity in workplace bullying by co-workers and others as witnesses or bystanders to bullying, using critical literature and three stories, the films *Trois huit* and *La loi du marché*, plus the play *Hard copy*.

Finally, Chapter 7 draws all these issues and themes together to examine, in particular, in what ways storytelling can be said to reflect authentic lived experience and whether the initial hypothesis that storytelling can provide a countervailing force to neoliberal communications is supported by the subsequent critical analysis.

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[43] Ledun, *Les visages écrasés* (2011), Dir. Louis-Julien Petit, *Carole Matthieu*, Paradis Films, 2016, François Emmanuel, *La question humaine* (Paris: Stock, 2007), Dir. Nicolas Klotz, *La question humaine*, Sophie Dulac Distribution, 2007.

CHAPTER 1

Mind games: The workplace as battleground for psychological warfare

> … la violence symbolique assure la paix civile dans une structure inégalitaire des statuts, d'où l'importance cruciale du pouvoir symbolique qui, malgré son caractère *arbitraire mais caché, obtient l'obéissance sans recourir à la force ni physique ni économique* …
>
> [symbolic violence guarantees civil peace in a structure with unequal status, hence the crucial importance of symbolic power which, despite its arbitrary but covert nature, ensures obedience without resorting to physical or economic force …].[1]
>
> Storytelling is an indispensable human preoccupation, as important to us as all – almost – as breathing.[2]

As already evidenced in the Introduction, there has been an enormous upsurge in the number of stories representing workplace bullying over the last twenty years in French novels, plays and films. This chapter first examines the purposes served by such stories and postulates that fiction has a unique role to play when examined in relation to critical sources and, especially, as a force operating in opposition to pervasive corporate messaging with its underlying assumption, implicit or explicit, that capital and labour invariably share a common objective. The chapter then critically investigates a range of global, and domestic French, structural, cultural and social factors, including the recent criminalisation of workplace bully in France, that arguably suggest a cause and effect link between neoliberalism, psychological bullying and the increased interest in storytelling. This examination provides a context for constructing an overarching theoretical typology to describe the various manifestations of workplace bullying that exist today. The model with supporting argument, set out towards the end of this chapter, will be used as a basis for analysing stories across this study.[3]

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[1] Lahouari Addi, Violence symbolique et statut du politique dans l'œuvre de Pierre Bourdieu, *Revue française de science politique*, 2001/6, Vol. 51, p. 950 [online] <https://halshs.archives-ouvertes.fr/halshs-00398864/document> [accessed 15/01/2019].

[2] John Yorke, *Into the Woods* (London: Penguin, 2013), Introduction, p. xvii.

Workplace bullying itself is not a new phenomenon in historical terms, while relationships of power, conflict and domination in the workplace have traditionally been designated using Marxist terms such as 'exploitation' and 'alienation', that is, coercion of labour by capital and subsequent individual estrangement from others because of the class stratification of society. Marx believed that the 'exploitation' of labour within capitalism was structural, that is, it derived from a system of institutions deliberately established with a set of supporting rules unjustifiably to favour one faction of society to the disadvantage of others. Marx also defined 'alienation' broadly as the inevitable by-product of capitalism, that is, a system in which people who labour accept the separation of producers and the means of production in capitalist society as both 'natural' and fair.[4]

In the contemporary workplace in France, these traditional terms have been displaced by the notions of 'souffrance' [suffering] or 'stress' which appear as difficult to define precisely as workplace bullying because, as sociologist Marc Loriol has demonstrated, there is neither a universal agreement of the meaning of these terms nor a common basis of measurement. For instance:

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[3] This study as a whole deals principally with large private sector companies, as this is where most storytelling concentrates. However, there is substantial evidence that this trend also impacts parts of the public sector and that small, local businesses are not immune – as illustrated by case law referred to later in this study. For the public sector, see, for instance, Marie Pezé, Quand le travail s'accélère à l'hôpital: quels sont les risques pour le professionnel de santé? 17/05/2019, *managersante.com* [online] <https://managersante.com/2019/05/17/24576/> [accessed 28/03/2020].

[4] Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, trans. Martin Milligan (London: Dancing Unicorn Books, Kindle edition, 2016). On the other hand, Émile Durkheim characterised 'alienation' differently, as the erosion of long-accepted social norms (including religious belief) that left people adrift in a state of 'anomie' as they questioned how they fitted into an increasingly complex and seemingly unstable order, and so felt lack of purpose, psychological emptiness and despair. Émile Durkheim, *De la division du travail social* (Charleston: Nabu Press, 2011) First published 1897.

> Le stress … est à la fois une cause et une conséquence des mutations du travail et des manières de le concevoir, de l'organiser, un élément parmi d'autres des métamorphoses de l'étayage social de l'individu productif. Les situations de travail, le vécu des salariés et leurs représentations des difficultés se constituent mutuellement dans un processus de boucles interactives … ces processus conduisent à des configurations à chaque fois spécifiques, la plainte de stress pouvant prendre un sens différent d'un métier à l'autre, voire d'un service à l'autre.
>
> [Stress … is both a cause and a consequence of changes at work and the ways in which it is designed and organised, one element among others of the metamorphosis of the social support given to productive individuals. Work situations, workers' experiences and how they represent its difficulties are mutually organised in a process of interactive loops … these processes lead to specific configurations each time, as claims of stress may take on different meanings from one job to another, or even from one department to another.][5]

In her 1998 ground-breaking study of routinised aggression at work, French psychologist, Marie-France Hirigoyen, describes how different forms and degrees of mental suffering can result from 'le harcèlement moral' or workplace bullying.[6] In the contemporary workplace, Hirigoyen sees bullying as generally non-physical, repeated and involving psychological domination or coercive control by the bully (or bullies) over a target who is usually a subordinate, but can equally be a peer or even a superior. Today's workplace, therefore, can be considered as a battleground of competing psychological pressures where bullies, often in more senior hierarchical positions, seek to dominate workers by deploying a variety of stratagems, that is, mind games, that generally exclude physical force, to wear down and overcome any mental opposition, sometimes facilitated by digital technology.

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[5] Marc Loriol, Pourquoi tout ce stress? in Michel Lallement, Catherine Marry et al., Maux du travail: dégradation, recomposition ou illusion? *Sociologie du travail* Vol. 53, 2011, pp. 9–10.

[6] Marie-France Hirigoyen, *Le harcèlement moral: la violence perverse au quotidien* (Paris: La découverte, 1998).

Why storytelling?

To understand how fictional storytelling fits into this complex landscape and what differentiates it from other information sources, it conceivably needs to be situated in relation to critical commentaries on workplace bullying, as well as the many ways organisations communicate with their various audiences, especially workers.

Critical commentaries include studies by psychologists and sociologists, such as, respectively, Yves Clot and Vincent de Gaulejac, who use their clinical and research experiences to draw out general conclusions on the nature of human behaviour in organisations, particularly about how workers respond to management pressures. Clot, for instance, contends that workers' responses to management coercion sometimes feel paradoxical because, despite the challenges such behaviour creates, workers will sometimes, presumably for fear of losing their job, demonstrate:

> leur désir de travailler malgré tout, qui tourne trop souvent mal, mais sans disparaître.
>
> [… their desire to work despite everything, which too often goes wrong, but without disappearing].[7]

Meanwhile, de Gaulejac, argues that workplace psychological violence is seen by managers as a legitimate way of working where it supports the need to increase financial return by instilling in workers the belief that they can only find meaning in their work by identifying completely with the goals of the organisation. Thus management:

> … fait appel à la responsabilité, la créativité et l'autonomie du travailleur comme sujet, mais – et c'est l'un des paradoxes qu'il introduit – il cherche dans le même temps à instrumentaliser et formater ce sujet, en lui faisant intérioriser les exigences de l'entreprise pour qu'il y adhère comme s'il s'agissait des siennes.
>
> [… appeals to the responsibility, creativity and autonomy of workers as subjects, but – and this is one of the paradoxes it introduces – it seeks simultaneously to

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[7] Yves Clot, *Le travail à coeur: Pour en finir avec les risques psychosociaux* (Paris: La Découverte Poche, 2015), p. 156.

> instrumentalise and configure these subjects, making them internalise the demands of the business so they adhere to them as if they were their own].[8]

In contrast to the rigour and value of these critical commentaries, this chapter postulates that, fictional storytelling provides a unique contribution to our understanding of workplace bullying in contemporary organisations. This is because of the profound manner in which fiction represents, examines and contrasts the lived experiences of individual workers by engaging audiences and presenting evolving narratives, rather than employing completed summary case studies, such as those used by Hirigoyen.[9]

This means that when they engage with these stories, audiences for fiction may literally live through individual experiences of bullying, as witnesses, as these stories unfold. This level of engagement helps the reader/spectator put themselves into the bullying target's shoes as the latter strives to adjust to actions and decisions that are outside their control.

This chapter also argues that the greatest contribution of storytelling to this debate is best understood, not just as it relates to critical studies, but in how storytelling operates uniquely as a countervailing source of evidence about modern workplace interactions, or as part of a dialectic, in relation to corporate messaging – the principal flow of communications within organisations. Such communications include values statements, HR policies and procedures and announcements about the likely impact on workers of internal change. These are significant as much for what they say as how their intention is expressed. As Jean-Luc Bouillon and colleagues put it:

> Les organisations, ainsi, s'autoconstituent, visent à forger une 'identité organisationnelle' pour elles-mêmes et pour les autres, par le discours ou des supports de communication variés.

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[8] Gilles Arnaud and Jean-Philippe Bouilloud, Entretien avec Vincent de Gaulejac: Le sujet au coeur des paradoxes du management, *Nouvelle revue de psychosociologie*, 2012/1 no. 13, pp. 265–275 [online] <https://www.cairn.info/revue-nouvelle-revue-de-psychosociologie-2012-1-page-265.htm> [accessed 01/04/2020].

[9] Marie-France Hirigoyen, *Malaise dans le travail: Harcèlement moral démêler le vrai du faux* (Paris: Syros, 2001).

> [So, organisations are self-constituting, aiming to forge an 'organisational identity' for themselves and others, through discourse or a range of communication media.][10]

This sense of organisational identity is also conveyed beyond the workplace in, for instance, recruitment advertising, public relations and brand management. So, for instance, the French motor company, PSA, expresses its notion of solidarity with workers and other interest groups with the byline:

> gagnerensemble #Agilité #Efficience [wintogether #Agility #Efficiency][11]

while the banking group, Société Générale, trumpets:

> C'EST VOUS, L'AVENIR [YOU ARE THE FUTURE][12]

Of course, these are unverifiable statements that should be considered as corporate propaganda, that is, unless or until proven otherwise, they are effectively fiction masquerading as fact. As Christian Salmon argues, narratives authored by public relations specialists or 'spin doctors' are used by businesses and other power elites, such as politicians, specifically to manipulate interest groups, including workers, and consumers, into believing a particular view of the world through the terminology they employ. These fabrications, also plausibly inherent in the way HR departments operate, impact potential recruits into organisations and not just those already employed.[13]

Many of the stories analysed in this study, such as the film *Corporate* and the novel *Des clous*, provide representations of management language

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10 Jean-Luc Bouillon, Sylvie Bourdin et Catherine Loneux, La communication organisationnelle aux 'approches communicationnelles' des organisations: glissement paradigmatique et migrations conceptuelles, Communication & organisation, Migrations conceptuelles, no 31 , 2007, p. 7–25 [online] <https://doi.org/10.4000/communicationorganisation.90> [accessed 01/04/2020].

11 Group PSA homepage [online| <https://www.groupe-psa.com/fr/actualites/corporate/gagnerensemble-agilite-efficience/> [accessed 17/01/2020].

12 Société Générale homepage [online] <https://cestvouslavenir.societegenerale.com> [accessed 17/01/2029].

13 Christian Salmon, Storytelling: La machine à fabriquer des histoires et à formater les esprits (Paris: Éditions La Découverte, 2008).

that are wilfully open to misconstruction so that, for instance, the organisation can, at some point should it wish, deny the intent of a particular initiative. This 'novlangue managériale' ['managerial newspeak']:

> contribue à l'euphémisation du pouvoir dans les organisations … cette intériorisation résulte d'une incorporation … ou d'une appropriation … du discours managérial, en appui sur les structures linguistiques, psychiques et sociales existantes.
>
> [… contributes deliberately to obscuring the exercise of power in organisations … this internalisation stems from an incorporation … or appropriation … of managerial discourse, based on existing linguistic, psychic and social structures].[14]

There is an historical context to this practice. In his essay on language as propaganda, Eric Hazan quotes Victor Klemperer, a Jewish Holocaust survivor, whose wartime journal recorded that the most insidious artefacts of Nazi power were not posters and flags, but:

> des expressions isolées, des tournures, des formes syntaxiques qui s'imposaient à des millions d'exemplaires et qui furent adoptées de façon mécanique et inconsciente.
>
> [… isolated expressions, turns of phrase, forms of syntax imposed with millions of copies and adopted in a mechanical and unconscious way].[15]

Hazan argues that in neoliberalism such terminological propaganda has two distinct functions.[16] First, it circumvents an established meaning to create a new connotation in the minds of the receiver that then radically alters their perception. The example he provides is the euphemistic term 'partenaires sociaux' to describe what might otherwise be viewed as the struggle for influence in employer/union relations – an association traditionally labelled in English as 'both sides of industry'. By describing this relationship as an alliance with shared interests, the sense of inherent conflict evaporates. The second function of this linguistic manipulation is to take a 'mot banal' (an 'ordinary word') and dilute, as well as alter, its meaning. We see this routinely achieved in business where terms such as 'reform' and 'modernisation' are deployed – all meaningless in themselves but, within neoliberalism, they plausibly signpost potential large-scale job losses.

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[14] see, for instance, Agnes Vandevelde-Rougale (preface Giles Hereros) *La* novlangue managériale (Erès, 2017), p. 20 [online] <http://excerpts.numilog.com/books/9782749253718.pdf> [accessed 19/03/2018].

[15] Eric Hazan, *LQR La propogande du quotidien* (Paris: Éditions Raisons d'Agir, 2006), pp. 11–12.

[16] Hazan, *op.cit.*, 2006, pp. 28–31.

Sociologist and anthropologist, Pierre Bourdieu, maintains that this kind of terminology constitutes a form of covert, institutionalised violence – all the more powerful because of the complicity of individuals who arbitrarily impose it on others – an action which legitimises its use. For Bourdieu, this represents:

> Un pouvoir symbolique … qui suppose la reconnaissance, c'est-à-dire la méconnaissance de la violence qui s'exerce à travers lui.
>
> [Symbolic power … that takes what it is for granted, i.e. it ignores the violence that it brings to bear.][17]

Meanwhile, sociologist, Jean-Pierre Le Goff, provides a clear set of illustrations of the euphemistic as well as elastic nature of 'la novlangue', reprinted as Table 1.

These examples plainly illustrate how management terminology extracts new meaning from words and in so doing can obscure organisational intent.

Such messages, therefore, whether internal or external to the organisation, may be used both with an intention to inform but also deliberately to shape audience perceptions and behaviour. As de Gaulejac puts it:

> La 'novlangue managériale' est un extraordinaire tissu d'oxymores ('autonomie contrôlée', 'excellence durable', ' croissance négative'…), qui ont la faculté de dire tout à la fois une chose et son contraire. Le sujet est obligé d'en faire usage professionnellement. Il n'arrive plus à produire de sens subjectif ! Le langage utilisé au travail, au lieu d'être facteur de cohérence, de prise de conscience et de clarté, se révèle facteur d'opacité, de confusion et entretient ces paradoxes dans lesquels le sujet risque de se perdre.
>
> ['Managerial newspeak' is an extraordinary fabric of oxymorons ('controlled autonomy', 'sustainable excellence', 'negative growth', etc.), whose ability is to say one thing and its opposite at the same time. The subject is obliged to use them for work. They can no longer produce subjective meaning! The language used at work, instead of being a factor of coherence, awareness and clarity, reveals itself as opaque, confused and maintains these paradoxes in which the subject risks losing themselves].[18]

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[17] Pierre Bourdieu, *Choses dites* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1987), p. 191.

[18] Arnaud and Bouilloud, Entretien avec VdG (2012).

Table 1. Building hollow phrases with Le Goff’s ‘formulateur automatique’ [‘automatic formulator’]

L’excellence *Excellence*	renforce *strengthens*	les facteurs *institutional*	institutionnels *elements*	de la performance *of performance*
L’intervention *Intervention*	mobilise *mobilises*	les processus *the organisational*	organisationnels *processes*	du dispositive *of the system*
L’objectif *The objective*	révèle *reveals*	les paramètres *the qualitative*	qualitatifs *parameters*	de l’entreprise *of the business*
Le diagnostic *Diagnostics*	stimule *stimulate*	les changements *the analytical*	analytiques *changes*	*du groupe* *for the group*
L’experimentation *Experimenting*	modifie *modifies*	les concepts *the characteristic*	caractéristiques *concepts*	du projet *of the project*
La formation *Training*	clarifie *clarifies*	les savoir-faires *motivational*	motivationnels *know how*	des bénéficiares *of its beneficiaries*
L’évaluation *evaluation*	renouvelle *renews*	les problèmes *the pedagogical*	pédagogiques *problems*	de la hiérarchie *of the organisational structure*
La finalité *The goal*	identifie *identifies*	les indicateurs *representative*	représentatifs i*ndicators*	des pratiques *of our practices*
L’expression *Expression*	perfectionne *fine-tunes*	les résultats *the participative*	participatifs *results*	de la démarche *of the approach*
Le vécu *Experience*	programme *programmes*	les besoins *the neurolinguistic*	neurolinguistiques *needs*	des structures *of structures*
Le recadrage *Reframing*	ponctue *punctuates*	les paradoxes *the systemic*	systémiques *paradoxes*	du métacontexte *of the meta-context*
Le management *Management*	développe *develops*	les effets *the cumulative*	cumulatifs *effects*	des acteurs *of actors*

Chaque mot d’une colonne peut être combiné avec n’importe quel mot des autres colonnes. À utiliser sans modération pour briller à votre travail ou chez vos amis!
(Each word in a column can be combined with any word in the other columns. Use it without moderation to shine at work or with your friends!)
Jean-Pierre Le Goff, *Les illusions de management: pour le retour du bon sens* (Paris: Éditions La Découverte, 2003), p. 161.

Arguably, dissonance between internal messaging and the actual lived experiences of workers can sap morale and motivation as workers feel themselves coerced and psychologically caged in. This can be seen in the novels of such writers as Thierry Beinstingel, Marin Ledun and Delphine de Vigan that explore the nature of psychological violence based, in part, on their own direct work experiences of operating in coercive environments.[19] As de Vigan notes in a recent magazine interview about one of her novels that includes bullying and sexual harassment:

> J'ai écrit *Les heures souterraines* dans les mois qui ont suivi mon licenciement par l'entreprise dans laquelle j'étais salariée depuis onze ans.
>
> [I wrote *Underground Time* in the months following my dismissal by a business where I'd worked for 12 years].[20]

It should also be remembered that individual workers who find themselves coerced and dominated by management, are equally capable of creating and sustaining confusing messages themselves by saying what they believe the organisation wants to hear and not what they really believe. As James C. Scott points out:

> The dissembling of the weak in the face of power is hardly an occasion for surprise.[21]

Moreover, fictional storytelling clearly examines in depth the way individuals respond to messages from senior management that are then implemented by middle managers. These latter are implicated as both bullies and targets in situations in which they are themselves psychologically squeezed as part of a routinised process of bullying. Such predicaments are clearly evidenced in the film, *La question humaine*, and the stage play, *Les nouveaux barbares*. Fiction's ability to provide a counter discourse to corporate messaging provides many examples of psychological bullying, such as exclusion (the play *Au pays des*), mockery (the novel and film *La question humaine*) and individual humiliation (the play *Hard copy*).[22]

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[19] As noted elsewhere in this book both Beinstingel and Ledun have spoken and written about their experiences of psychological violence while at France Télécom.

[20] Anne Sogno, Harcèlement: Delphine de Vigan et Philippe Harel racontent leurs *Heures souterraines* , *TéléObs*, 15/01/2020 [online] <https://www.nouvelobs.com/tv/20200115.OBS23505/harcelement-delphine-de-vigan-et-philippe-harel-racontent-leurs-heures-souterraines.html> [accessed 01/04/2020].

[21] James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcript*s (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990), p. 1.

Given that psychological pressure can be exerted in many innovative ways, this study seeks to identify common themes across storytelling and, where appropriate, highlight those instances when the nature of bullying is specific to an economic sector as well as a particular individual. For instance, in Élodie Llorca's novel, *La correction* [*The Correction*], a magazine proof-reader becomes aware that edits he has made to rectify spelling and grammatical errors in journalists' articles are being systematically reversed by the magazine's editor who is his line manager. As this novel progresses and the re-editing continues, the editor insists that no changes have been made to the proof-reader's work. The latter then becomes increasingly mentally unstable and loses the ability to distinguish between the authentic and what is imagined.[23] Meanwhile, in Jacques Audiard's film, *Sur mes lèvres* [*Read my Lips*], the focus is on psychological bullying of a deaf clerical worker who is allegedly incompetent. This film shows the revenge the worker takes against those colleagues who have discriminated against her. What might be called 'revenge narratives' that is, tales that specifically and deliberately act as a form of emotional release for the writer, are a feature of some of these stories. For instance, although it remains unverifiable, the preface to Isabelle Coulomb's novel, *Cher Monsieur P.* (*Dear Mr P.*), states:

> Cette histoire, malheureusement, est inspirée d'un fait réel. Parce qu'il s'agit d'une histoire de harcèlement, de souffrance et de haine, ce livre a été écrit pour la paix, pour la joie de vivre et l'amour.

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[22] All these stories are critically analysed as follows.

[23] Élodie Llorca, *La correction* (Paris: Rivages, 2016).

> [Unfortunately, this story is inspired by reality. Because it's a story about bullying, suffering and hatred, this book has been written for peace, the joy of living and love].[24]

Feasibly, all fictional storytelling, with its imagined protagonists, has the power to emotionally connect with audiences by sharing comparatively credible lived experiences at and beyond the workplace. Each story explicitly acknowledges the inherent nature of workplace violence in neoliberal organisations in an empathetic and immediate way. It also engages readers and spectators by deploying a range of techniques, specific to fiction, that build tension, intrigue and suspense. These include presenting events out of their actual sequence in time, such as in the film *Trois huit*, where the main protagonist is unexpectedly revealed in one scene with his hand bandaged, while the incident that gave rise to this is only shown later in flash back.[25] It may be that, as the bandage is revealed, the spectator is compelled to engage more deeply with the film by asking themselves: 'When, why and how, did this event occur? Was it an accident or deliberate?' The film-maker is thus opening up a range of possibilities for the spectator to investigate. Moreover, it seems plausible that only a minority of spectators will immediately fathom that, as they all eventually witness, the damage was self-inflicted and is largely the result of psychological pressure.

Such 'temporal resequencing' using flashback is also a particular feature of crime fiction where the reader/spectator follows detectives as they systematically 'wind back' the story through time to discover the perpetrator. For instance, the novel, *Alice ou le choix des armes* [*Alice or the Choice of Weapons*], combines themes of workplace psychological violence with a murder mystery, as a detective examines the possible guilt of a worker after her line manager is found dead in mysterious circumstances.[26]

In addition, each form of fiction has its own distinctive features to draw in its audience. These include close up in film, breaking through the 'fourth wall' in a theatrical monologue and 'stream of consciousness' narrative in novels. Stéphane Bikialo and Jean-Paul Engélibert maintain that these techniques help make contemporary workplace storytelling cutting-edge, inventive, demanding and, with specific regard to the written word:

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[24] Isabelle Coulomb, *Cher Monsieur P.* (Paris: Société des écrivains, 2012), p. 8.

[25] Le Guay, *Trois huit* (2001).

[26] Stéphanie Chaillou, *Alice ou le choix des armes* (Paris: Alma, 2016).

> soucieuse de ne se situer ni hors du champs littéraire, ni à la marge, mais en son centre.
>
> [concerned not to be beyond the literary field, nor at the margin, but at its centre].[27]

All these examples support Didier Occhipinti's view that, in their work-related stories, French film-makers and writers show how they function as 'whistle blowers' for those workers who suffer but would otherwise not have a public voice.[28] In this context, the task of the cultural producer is to elicit sympathy from their audience by communicating the nature and depth of worker suffering; as well as inducing aversion towards antagonists who appear in these stories either as individuals or indeed as entire organisations.[29]

Sometimes the barrier between fiction and non-fiction is a porous one. Thus, psychologist, Oliver Sacks, has written appreciatively about using a fictional style for non-fictional patient case studies.[30] This is exactly the approach adopted by Hirigoyen in her landmark study on workplace bullying.[31]

Conversely, fiction frequently borrows from its contemporary world, including sometimes using it as a narrative stimulus. For instance, the play, *Les nouveaux barbares* was inspired by a radio news item.[32] Stories can also embody universal messages – while, arguably, those about bullying as a form of psychological violence specifically provide a way for targeted individuals to recognise they are not alone. This might help them share their experiences with others in a non-threatening manner, providing them with options for determining how they can progress beyond the agonising situation in which they find themselves.[33]

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[27] Stéphane Bikialo and Jean-Paul Engélibert, Dire le travail: fiction et témoignage depuis 1980, Avant-propos, 2012, p. 29.

[28] Didier Occhipinti, "Control and Resistance: An Exploration of Contemporary French Writing and Film on the Effects of Globalisation in the Workplace" (PhD thesis, London: King's College, 2018) [online] <https://kclpure.kcl.ac.uk/portal/en/theses/control-and-resistance(afbbf2d6-98a4-464a-967f-7223f6e0663a).html> [accessed 04/08/2018].

[29] Howard Sklar, *The Art of Sympathy in Fiction: Forms of Ethical and Emotional Persuasion* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2013).

[30] Oliver Sacks, *On the Move: A Life* (London: Picador, 2016), p. 178 referring to Aleksander Romanovich, *The Mind of a Mnemonist: A Little Book about a Vast Memory* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986).

[31] Hirigoyen, *Le harcèlement* (1998).

[32] *Les nouveaux barbares* de Frédéric El Kaïm, *Théâtrorama*, 2015 <http://www.theatrorama.com/actualites/en-coulisse/les-nouveaux-barbares-de-frederic-el-kaim/http://www.theatrorama.com/actualites/en-coulisse/les-nouveaux-barbares-de-frederic-el-kaim/> [accessed 07 February 2018]. Clearly, writers

Drawing these various strands together, this particular analysis has sought to demonstrate that fictional stories about workplace bullying provide a metaphorical bulwark against corporate messaging by repeatedly demonstrating that the organisation's official view of actuality is but one version of individual lived experience in the workplace. Furthermore, fiction holds up a series of mirrors to such experience so that its audiences, who may well include bullying targets, can enter the minds of others to help them move towards some form of resolution of the emotional dilemmas they themselves may face. Some of these mirrors may deliberately distort actuality, but only with the intention of sharpening our perception, not obscuring it. As the US playwright and critic Edward Albee, put it:

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have long used real events as the basis for fictionalised expositions. Shakespeare, for instance, built much of his career on such a premise, while the contemporary French novelist, Patrick Modiano, routinely blends fact with fiction. As recently pointed out by two UK-based academics, fiction helps us make more sense of fact, particularly when we are struggling to understand what events have occurred in the 'real' world. Robin Holt and Mike Zundel, "Using Fiction in Organization and Management Research," in *Unconventional Methodology in Organization and Management Research*, eds Alan Bryman and David A. Buchanan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), pp. 45–63.

[33] Notably, the French writer and thinker, Albert Camus, argued that:

> *L'art n'est pas à mes yeux une réjouissance solitaire. Il est un moyen d'émouvoir le plus grand nombre d'hommes en leur offrant une image privilégiée des souffrances et des joies communes. Il oblige donc l'artiste à ne pas s'isoler ; il le soumet à la vérité la plus humble et la plus universelle.* [Art is not in my eyes a solitary delight. It's a way of moving the greatest number of people by providing them with a privileged image of common suffering and joy. It therefore obliges artists not to isolate themselves; it subjects them to the most humble and most universal truth.]

Albert Camus, "Extract from Speech at the Nobel Banquet at the City Hall in Stockholm" (10 October 1957) <https://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1957/camus-speech-f.html> [accessed 12 March 2018].

> Good writers define reality, bad ones merely restate it. A good writer turns fact into truth, a bad writer will more often than not accomplish the opposite.[34]

France and neoliberalism[35]

As a way of seeking to understand the interest in, and growth of, storytelling about workplace bullying in France, this chapter now critically examines how the French economy has changed over the last forty years and how these changes, including digitalisation and globalisation of markets, have impacted on the lived experiences of individual workers.

The advent of neoliberalism in 1980s France may plausibly be viewed as the start of a somewhat traumatic period for many workers. France's national statistics institute, INSEE, notes that the thirty-year period, 1982–2012, was marked by a weakening of economic growth and a continued reduction in the role of agriculture in the economy from 18 per cent (1949) to 10 per cent (1960s) then to between 1.5 per cent and 2 per cent (2012–2014).[36] The substantial economic transformation also includes partial or full privatisation of former public sector organisations as a response to the perceived failures of protectionist 'dirigiste' policies, where historically the French State previously intervened routinely in the economy to support local markets.[37] This particular shift opened French markets up to global commercial competition, notably with growth in use of information technology and innovations in the nature of management control and work at local level.[38] It seems credible that these developments contributed, in turn, to a move away from traditional models of collective responsibility at the workplace to an emphasis on individual accountability which was re-enforced by the introduction of US-style performance management techniques, including individual objectives and performance pay, along with the introduction of individualised working hours.[39]

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[34] Edward Albee, "The Writer as Independent Spirit," *The Saturday Review*, 4 June 1966, pp. 26–27, <http://www.unz.org/Pub/SaturdayRev-1966jun04-00026:28?View=PDFPage&Author=Albee&Text=reality&HitList=59acf66397595e32d1f865b8618048b7> [accessed 1/10/2017].

[35] For ease of analysis, this book, while partly written during the 2020 global Coronavirus pandemic, ignores its impact on national economies because the long-term impact is currently unknown.

[36] Emmanuelle Nauze-Fichet and Stéphane Tagnan (Co-ord.), *Trente ans de vie économique et sociale* (Paris: INSEE, 2014), p. 21 [online] <https://www.insee.fr/fr/statistiques/1374372?sommaire=1374377> [accessed 08/10/2018].

[37] Basak Kus, "Neoliberalism, Institutional Change and the Welfare State: The Case of Britain and France," 01/12/2006 [online] <https://doi.org/10.1177/0020715206070268> [accessed 28/03/2020].

During the same period, INSEE recorded increased job instability (précarisation) in the labour market, along with a 7 per cent fall in national productivity in the period 1949–2012 due to increased use of part-time work, statutory increases in annual leave and reductions in normal working hours.[40] Furthermore, between 1982 and 2012 unemployment rose and continues to stand at between 8 per cent and 10 per cent.[41] Significantly, this period was also marked by a growth of short-term contracts (CDDs) and interim work that is, short-term contract working by the self-employed. Between 1982 and 2012 employment on open-ended contracts (CDIs) fell from 94 per cent to 87 per cent, while CDD working grew from 5 per cent to 10 per cent. These trends appear to be continuing slowly.[42] Increases in

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[38] Saskia Sassen, "Globalization or Denationalization," *Review of International Political Economy* 10 (1 February 2003): pp. 1–22 [online] <https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Saskia_Sassen/publication/247512829_Globalization_or_Denationalization/links/55d1fae108ae0a341720dfb9.pdf> [accessed 28/03/2020].

[39] The growth of individualism over collectivism brought about by neoliberal organisations is a constant theme in the landmark study by Boltanski and Chiapello. Luc Boltanski and Ève Chiapello, *Le nouvel esprit du capitalism* (Paris: Gallimard, 1999, 2011).

[40] Nauze-Fichet and Tagnan, *Trente ans* (2014), p. 90 and p. 140.

[41] N.B. For comparison, the UK, with a similarly sized workforce, recorded unemployment constantly below the French level during this entire period. The UK figure stood at less than half the French figure in February 2020 [online] <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Unemployment_statistics> [accessed 23/04/2020].

[42] According to Dares, CDDs represented 12 per cent of the workforce in 2017. *Dares études et statistiques*, CDD, CDI: comment évoluent les embauches et les

CDD work have proven especially attractive to women and young people with 27 per cent of CDD jobs going to the under 25s in 2012. More recently, INSEE and the Labour Ministry statistics division, Dares, have recorded that CDDs are most frequently allocated to unskilled workers, while the probability of transferring from a CDD to a CDI appears easier for those under age 35 than older workers.[43] This means that the 'holy grail' of an open-ended contract is far from guaranteed once the short-term contract has ended and this fact may well be used by management to enforce behavioural compliance during the CDD contract term where a worker makes it known that they would like to remain with the organisation beyond this period. It seems credible that such tensions do not build trust and loyalty between the transient worker and the organisation.

Continual monitoring, surveillance and output measurement of workers through 'performance management' processes, creates constant pressures on workers. It may also encourage them to be viewed as objects, rather than people. Such objectification may be stimulated by employing US inspired management terminology that couples the word 'human' with those of 'resources' and 'capital'.[44] These actions imply equivalence with historically conventional business accounting terms, notably 'financial resources' and 'financial capital' – concepts that have measurement at their very heart.[45]

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ruptures depuis 25 ans, 21/06/18 [online] <https://dares.travail-emploi.gouv.fr/dares-etudes-et-statistiques/etudes-et-syntheses/dares-analyses-dares-indicateurs-dares-resultats/article/cdd-cdi-comment-evoluent-les-embauches-et-les-ruptures-depuis-25-ans> [accessed 23/04/2020].

43 Odran Bonnet, Simon Georges-Kot, and Pierre Pora, *L'INSEE Références - Emploi, chômage, revenus du travail* 2019, pp. 2–12 [online] <https://www.insee.fr/fr/statistiques/4183052?sommaire=4182950Emploi>, chômage, revenus du travail [accessed 24/04/2020].

44 B. F. Kiker, "The Historical Roots of the Concept of Human Capital," *Journal of Political Economy* 74, no. 5 (October 1966): pp. 481–499, The University of Chicago Press [online] <https://www.jstor.org/journal/jpoliecon> [accessed 01/05/2020].

45 C. Lakshman, "Leveraging Human Capital through Performance Management Process: The Role of Leadership in the USA, France and India," *The International*

Individual concerns over lack of job security encouraged, in part, by constant digital monitoring have been further exacerbated where routine physical tasks have disappeared because they have either been 'offshored' to countries with cheaper labour costs or where such tasks have simply become automated through advances in technology, so no longer require human involvement to execute. According to Patrick Aubert and Patrick Sillard, between 1995 and 2001, an average of 13,500 jobs were lost each year in France's manufacturing sector as a consequence of offshoring.[46]

Deploying commercial strategies that transfer ownership of business risk increasingly to workers in these ways may be considered central to the global neoliberal credo that long-term commercial accomplishment depends on constant innovation. It seems axiomatic that large-scale economic, technological and structural changes all have the potential to open up new markets.[47] With this notion in mind, the French economist, Thomas Coutrot, argues that pressure to innovate to ensure the survival of the neoliberal organisation takes primacy over human suffering because business:

> … introduit un principe de coopération forcée qui allie les avantages d'un régime despotique (point n'est véritablement besoin de passer un compromis social avec le travail) et d'un régime hégémonique (la subjectivité des salariés est effectivement mobilisée)
>
> [… introduces a principle of forced cooperation combining the benefits of a despotic regime (with no real need for social compromise with labour) and an hegemonic regime (workers' subjectivity is effectively mobilised)].[48]

Journal of Human Resource Management 25 (10, 2014): p. 1356, http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2013.870310 ; <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2013.870310> [accessed 18 October 2017].

[46] Patrick Aubert and Patrick Sillard, "Offshoring and Job Losses in French Industry," *OECD Workshop on the Globalisation of Production*, Paris, 15–16/11/2005 [online] <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/282184071_Offshoring_and_Job_Losses_in_French_Industry> [accessed 18/04/2020].

[47] Joseph Isern and Caroline Pung, "Harnessing Energy to Drive Organizational Change," *McKinsey Quarterly* 1 (2007): pp. 16–19 [online] <https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/organization/our-insights/driving-radical-change> [accessed 18/02/2020].

[48] Thomas Coutrot, *Néo-libération du travail et autogestion* [online] <http://hussonet.free.fr/tcneolib.pdf> [accessed 12/12/2018].

There are several implications for workers of applying such a commercial model. While the business demand for greater labour flexibility has led to reduced employment stability through shorter contracts, individual skill requirements never remain constant and frequently become redundant because of the prevailing need for organisational innovation. This means that workers have to learn new skills throughout their careers to avoid unemployment. As a consequence, what organisations define as flexibility, workers may well experience as psychological suffering and stress brought on and sustained by continued insecurity about their jobs. According to Boltanski and Chiapello, such instability for workers has also had an impact on family life which:

> … connaissait une évolution dont on est encore loin d'avoir mesuré les effets … Elle est devenue une institution beaucoup plus mouvante et fragile, ajoutant une précarité supplémentaire à celle de l'emploi et au sentiment d'insécurité …
>
> [… was evolving and where the effects are still far from being measured … It has become a much more mobile and fragile institution, adding an extra layer of precariousness on top of that to be found in employment and its sense of insecurity …].[49]

In addition, sociologist, Rolande Pinard, maintains that a sense of personal destabilisation among workers has built up over recent decades because of the individualisation of the employment relationship.[50] He argues that the commercial posture taken by organisations here is also a consequence of two historical pressures: fears of recurrence of the strikes that accompanied widespread civil disruption in France in 1968; and the recognition, especially after the 'chocs pétroliers' [oil shocks] of the 1970s, of the need to improve France's ability to compete in domestic and global markets.[51] Today, he contends, this situation has promoted a sense of individual suffering as workers feel insecure in their jobs and find they are competing with colleagues, rather than sharing a feeling of solidarity with them.

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[49] Boltanski and Chiapello, *Le nouvel esprit* (1999, 2011). The impact of work-related stress on family life is one of the issues critically analysed in Chapter 2. This is supported by detailed examples from fiction.

[50] Rolande Pinard, *La précarisation de l'emploi: de quoi s'agit-il?*, *Relations*, no. 748 mai 2011 [online] <http://cjf.qc.ca/revue-relations/publication/article/la-precarisation-de-lemploi-de-quoi-sagit-il/> [accessed 28/11/2018].

[51] Ludivine Batigny, 1968 – De grands soirs en petits matins, (Dijon: Édition Universitaires de Dijon, 2018). See also : Emmanuelle Nauze-Fichet and Stéphane

It may also be argued that deskilling, including limiting the need for workers to make their own judgements when carrying out tasks, has become a major feature of modern business with its increasing standardisation of work processes and the use of technology in support of the desire to increase shareholder value.[52] According to Vincent de Gaulejac and Fabienne Hanique, this situation has generated stress among workers and reflects the paradox that, while organisational roles have become more complex overall, the actual tasks carried out by workers have grown more routinised.[53] There is a particularly potent example of individual deskilling in Thierry Beinstingel's novel, *Retour aux mots sauvages*, where a redundant and highly skilled engineer secures a new job as a call-centre operator and gradually realises that his hands, the main tools of his working life to date:

> Se changer en chou-fleur inutile.
>
> [Are transforming into useless cauliflour shapes.][54]

This focus on the individual has arguably contributed to an erosion of class consciousness in France. This particular view is supported in the sociological research carried out by Bourdieu and his colleagues in the late 1980s.[55] In one study, Gérard, a middle-aged worker with fifteen years' service at Peugeot's Sochaux car plant, bemoans the dismantling of the old system of social relations that prevailed at work until the mid-1980s. He talks about:

Tagnani (Co-ord.), *Trente ans de la vie économique et sociale* (Paris: Institut national de la statistique et des études économiques, 2014).

[52] Marie-Liesse Nimier, L'organisation du travail: l'histoire de son évolution, *PedagoPsy.eu* (undated) [online] <http://pedagopsy.eu/ml_organisation_travail.html> [accessed 08/04/2020].

[53] Vincent de Gaulejac and Fabienne Hanique, *Le capitalisme paradoxant* (Paris: Seuil, 2015), pp. 46–53.

[54] Thierry Beinstingel, *Retour aux mots sauvages* (Paris: Fayard/ Le livre de poche, 2010) chapter 12, p. 53 (See Chapter 5).

[55] Pierre Bourdieu, *La Misère du Monde* (Paris: éditions du Seuil, 1993).

> … déception qui s'enracine également dans le pressentiment que les nouvelles générations ouvrières – les intermédiaires – ne viendront pas se joindre sauf miracle les anciennes et que la plupart des formes anciennes de combat ouvrier ne pourront pas être reprises parce qu'elles ne seront plus ajustées aux nouvelles situations.
>
> [… disappointment which is also rooted in the suspicion that new generations of workers – the intermediaries – will not come and join older ones, except in the event of a miracle, and that most of the old forms of workers' struggle can't be taken up any more because they will no longer take account of new situations].[56]

This argument also suggests that lack of worker solidarity is reflected in the decline of trade union and communist party membership in France.[57] Martin O'Shaughnessy labels this contraction as a process of 'co-option and disabling'.[58] He contends that capital has repeatedly outflanked the French working class in recent decades, in part, by organisations individualising employment contract terms.[59] One might contend this would, include scrapping the notion that there is always a single rate for each job – historically, one of the key pillars of collective bargaining – and replacing this with market based pay which can effectively become individualised.[60]

[56] Bourdieu, *La Misère* (1993), p. 337.

[57] French trade union membership of 8 per cent is among the lowest in Europe. Udo Rehfeldt, "Trade Union Strategies to Recruit New Groups of Workers – France," *Eurofound*, 2010 [online] <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/publications/report/2010/trade-union-strategies-to-recruit-new-groups-of-workers-france> [accessed 06/04/2020]. In addition, a study from the French State research organisation, CNRS, argues that that communist party membership declined by circa 50 per cent for the under 35s in the period 1978–1997. François Platane and Jean Ranger, *Les adhérents du Parti Communiste Français en 1997- Enquête*, Cahier du CEVIPOF n°27, June 2000 [online] <http://www.cevipof.org/fichier/p_publication/443/publication_pdf_cahier.27.pdf> [accessed 06/04/2020].

[58] Martin O'Shaughnessy, *The New Face of Political Cinema: Commitment in French Film since 1995* (New York ; Oxford: Berghahn, 2007).

[59] Luc Boltanski and Ève Chiappelli, *Le nouvel esprit du capitalisme* (Paris: Gallimard, 2011).

[60] Olivier Godechot, 'Quel est le salaire de marché ?' Enquêtes de rémunération et mise en forme du marché du travail dans l'industrie financière, Genèses, 2006/2 (no 63), pp. 108–127 [online] <https://www.cairn.info/revue-geneses-2006-2-page-108.htm> [accessed 24/04/2020].

Capital may have also gained traction over labour through legislative reform with the 1982 'lois Auroux', implemented under the Socialist President, François Mitterrand.[61] Danièle Linhart argues that this legislation swept away historically well-established, effective, diverse and (above all) informal, workplace problem-solving practices involving management and shop floor workers. Instead, it institutionalised worker involvement under management control through a statutory right of expression for individuals on their working conditions, with budgets for works councils [comités d'entreprise] and the establishment of health and safety committees [comités d'hygiène, de sécurité et des conditions de travail].[62] According to Linhart, these legal changes, ironically brought about by a left-of-centre government, facilitated and legitimised the emergence and dissemination of the neoliberal management model, resulting in the eventual introduction of new control and measurement technologies, the individualisation of employment contracts, as outlined earlier, and competition between workers. The practical impact of this legislation is one of the many paradoxes brought about by the advent of this economic model.[63]

This chapter also contends that since the advent of neoliberalism there has been a shift from physical to psychological bullying in business organisations. This manifests itself in multiple ways, such as mocking, exclusion, introducing unachievable performance targets and even depriving individuals of the ability to carry out their work in order to induce them to resign.[64] It appears feasible that neoliberalism has facilitated the growth of such psychological violence particularly because, in large complex organisations that are parts of international groups, managerial decision-makers are often no longer co-located with their operational subordinates, as they were during the era of industrial capitalism, and so have needed to find new ways to monitor, control and coordinate individual performance remotely.[65]

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[61] Danièle Linhart, *La comédie humaine du travail: De la déshumanisation taylorienne à la sur-humanisation managériale* (Toulouse: Erès, 2015), pp. 58–60.

[62] *Les lois Auroux: une étape clé de l'histoire de l'amélioration des conditions de travail* [online] <https://www.anact.fr/les-lois-auroux-une-etape-cle-de-lhistoire-de-lamelioration-des-conditions-de-travail> [accessed 03/10/2018].

[63] de Gaulejac and Hanique, *Le capitalisme paradoxant* (2015). The weakness of the French trade union movement may well be reflected in the minor role unions played in the recent widespread social disruption led by the grassroots, populist, 'gilets jaunes' in France in support of improved pay, pensions and unemployment benefit. Union failure to develop a common approach in support of these demands led to criticism, including in academic circles from the political affairs specialist, Jean-Marie Pernod and the sociologist Jean-François Amadieu. Air France Presse, 'Gilets jaunes' et syndicats, deux mondes parallèles, *Le Point*, 11/15/2019 [online] <https://www.lepoint.fr/societe/gilets-jaunes-et-syndicats-deux-mondes-paralleles-15-11-2019-2347548_23.php> [accessed 03/04/2020].

Workplace bullying: Understanding the French context

There does not appear to be any single overriding focus in the discussion about workplace violence in France. Some critics have situated the rise in interest in relation to the structural transformations associated with the shift to neoliberalism which:

> is everywhere both the outcome and the arena of social conflicts. It sets the political and economic agenda, limits the possible outcomes, biases expectations, and imposes urgent tasks on those challenging its assumptions, methods and consequences.[66]

However, other critics have focussed on the nature of psychological bullying and its effects on individuals. For instance, according to Hirigoyen, examination of individual cases of psychological bullying may reveal a pattern of mental abuse that gradually destroys individual perceptions of self-worth and leads to paranoia and chronic physical conditions.

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[64] Dominique Lhuilier, *Placardisés: des exclus dans l'entreprise* (Paris: Seuil, 2002).

[65] Christiano Busco, Elena Giovannoni, and Robert W. Scapens, "Managing the Tensions in Integrating Global Organisations: The Role of Performance Management Systems," *Management Accounting Research* 19, no. 2 (June 2008): pp. 103–125 [online] <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S1044500508000004> [accessed 04/04/2020].

[66] Alfredo Saad Filho and Deborah Johnston, *Neoliberalism: A Critical Reader* (London: Pluto Press, 2005) Introduction, pp. 3–4.

This assertion is supported by Hirigoyen's conclusion that psychological bullying is often associated with small, repeated behaviours.[67]

Hirigoyen introduced the notion of 'la perversion narcissique' to describe the characteristics of bullies, particularly in management positions, who believe that their own intellectual, moral and hierarchical superiority gives them free rein to act malevolently:

> Les pervers narcissiques … 'ne font pas exprès' de faire mal, ils font mal parce qu'ils ne savent pas faire autrement pour exister. Ils ont eux-mêmes été blessés dans leur enfance et essaient de se maintenir ainsi en vie. Ce transfert de douleur leur permet de se valoriser aux dépens d'autrui.
>
> [Narcissistic perverts … don't deliberately do harm, they do harm because they don't know any other way to exist. They were themselves harmed as children and tried to keep themselves alive. This transfer of pain allows them to value themselves at the expense of others].[68]

While Hirigoyen focusses on the individual relationship between target and bully, the psychoanalyst, Christophe Dejours, contemplates workplace bullying as a systemic feature of working life in the neoliberal society. He argues that it can be so routinised that it becomes accepted by society as a whole as a permissible way of behaving. Dejours' concept of the 'banalisation de l'injustice sociale' echoes Hannah Arendt's notion of the 'banality of evil' which describes the totalitarian behaviour of the Nazis in the first half of the twentieth century.[69][70] According to Dejours, under neoliberalism, coercion stems mostly from irresistible psychological pressures which can render workers unable to fight back:

> La majorité des gens peut être enrôlée au service d'un système dont pourtant elle désapprouve profondément les méthodes. Et elle montre – c'est ce qui est le plus frappant – que la mobilisation peut être obtenue sans usage de la force.

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67 Hirigoyen, *Le harcèlement moral* (1998), p. 15.

68 Hirigoyen, *Le harcèlement moral* (1998), p. 127.

69 Christophe Dejours, *Souffrance en France: la banalisation de l'injustice sociale* (Paris: Seuil, 1998).

70 Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem; A Report on the Banality of Evil* (Northampton: Viking Press, 1963).

> [Most people can be enlisted in the service of a system whose methods they deeply disapprove. And it reveals - most strikingly - that mobilisation can be achieved without the use of force.][71]

Dejours argues that work is a mediator in the building of identity, especially through the symbolic recognition it provides for individuals in determining their role in society and its power to promote wellbeing. He notes, however, that in the neoliberal working environment where individual behaviour is continually policed and controlled, the threat of denying work to individuals can be wielded psychologically as a weapon by citing changes in market conditions as the reason for redesigning jobs, along with promoting labour flexibility and performance evaluation. Dejours also argues that such measures go hand-in-hand with worker acceptance of what he calls 'la violence "banale" ' that includes deliberately encouraging workers mentally to turn in on themselves, thus creating delusions, mental confusion and other manifestations of psychological illness.[72] This psychodynamic view of work:

> starts from the premise that work is enigmatic: 'real' work often remains invisible, and the investments that individuals make in their work may take the form of drives and forms of sublimation of which they are not consciously aware.[73]

In his examination of workplace bullying under neoliberalism, the philosopher and sociologist, Jean-Pierre Le Goff, takes the view that the French concept of 'harcèlement moral' is best described as a 'syndrome', an ambiguous and confused notion which can include activities as diverse as:

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[71] Dejours, *Souffrance en France* (1998), p. ix. There are further parallels here with the evolving academic work led by Griselda Pollock and Max Silverman on the 'concentrationary' which argues broadly that the model of industrial slavery developed by the Nazis in concentration camps has been imported into modern business. Griselda Pollock and Max Silverman, eds, *Concentrationary Imaginaries: New Encounters, Arts, Cultures, Concepts* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2015).

[72] Christophe Dejours (dir.), *Conjurer la violence. Travail, violence et santé* (Paris: Éditions Payot & Rivages, 2007).

[73] John Marks, "The Psychodynamic Analysis of Work," *Modern and Contemporary France* (2019) [online] <https://doi.org/10.1080/09639489.2019.1702938> [accessed 22/01/2020].

> mensonge, mépris, et usage du paradoxe.
>
> [… *lies, contempt and use of paradox* …][74]

This broad categorisation may include Lhuilier's concept of 'la placardisation' – where individuals are ostracised, excluded from the main body of the workforce because they are seen as 'problem cases'. They are effectively prevented from working but not dismissed in the hope that they will resign, so avoiding any prospect of a 'licenciement abusif' ['unfair dismissal']– claim in French law.[75]

Lhuilier contends that the pressure on bullying targets is magnified because they do not always know what they are alleged to have done to render themselves out of favour. Lhuilier cites the case of Alain, an air transport manager, who unexpectedly finds he had been deprived of his assistant. Moreover, his computer has been 'envoyé en réparation' ['sent for repair'] and he is no longer invited to meetings. Meanwhile his boss tells him not to worry and that he is imagining things. However, this situation persists for three years and from Alain's perspective:

> 'C'est comme si vous étiez en prison. Vous voudriez sortir de là, une libération … les portes se ferment. On se retrouve seul. Ça me fait penser à des images de guerre, on est dans un trou immonde ou une cage, humilié, les gens vous jettent des ordures. On est totalement impuissant. On ne peut s'en sortir. Rien ne se passe. J'en ai marre. Je n'en peux plus.'
>
> [It's like being in prison. You want to get out of there, freedom … the doors are shut. You are alone. It reminds me of images of war, you're in a filthy hole or a cage, humiliated, people throw rubbish at you. You're totally powerless. You can't escape. Nothing happens. I'm fed up. I can't stand it anymore].[76]

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[74] Jean-Pierre Le Goff, Que veut dire le harcèlement moral? *Le Débat*, Gallimard, 2003/1 – n°123, pp. 141–161.

[75] Licenciement abusive, *saisirprudhommes.com* [online] <https://www.saisirprudhommes.com/fiches-prudhommes/licenciement/licenciement-abusif> [accessed 01/12/2019].

[76] Lhuilier, *Placardisés* (2002), pp. 54–55.

On the other hand, a third group of critics focuses on the nature of French society itself in determining the rationale for so much interest in workplace bullying. In particular, the sociologist, Alain Ehrenberg, proposes that this preoccupation reflects a greater sense of collective insecurity in France than in other major economies, particularly the US, where there is a stronger tradition of self-reliance. As a consequence:

> La souffrance sociale est la grand névrose narcissique française.
>
> [Social suffering is the great French narcissistic neurosis].[77]

He maintains that American society is individualistic and supports itself culturally through a powerful sense of self-help. The French, on the other hand, while also individualistic, do not possess such self-resilience and so have nothing to fall back on when they feel exposed. He contends that depression has acted across history in France as a clinical entity bridging the 'ancient' world of psychiatry and madness and the contemporary world of mental health and psychic suffering. He claims that during the second half of the twentieth century, depression accompanied the shift from discipline to autonomy. It gradually replaced Freudian neurosis, 'cette pathologie de la culpabilité' [this pathology of guilt], to become the hidden companion of the individual, normalised by autonomy. In the capitalist era of management discipline, the question for each worker was:

> Que m'est-il *permis* de faire ? [What am I *allowed* to do ?]

On the other hand, according to Ehrenberg, in contemporary culture where autonomy is prioritised and anyone can succeed through self-advancement, this question becomes a depressive one, that is:

> Suis-je *capable* de le faire ? [Am I *capable* of doing it ?]

So today, Ehrenberg asserts, 'la culpabilité névrotique' [neurotic guilt] continues to exist in France as a type of depressive deficiency. This generalised sense of social suffering is also, according to Ehrenberg, the consequence of a national collective over-investment in work as a source of self-fulfilment.[78] This has resulted in widespread concerns about job insecurity, unemployment and flexibility driven by:

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[77] Alain Ehrenberg, *La société de malais*e (Paris: Odile Jacob, 2010), p. 312.

> [un] adversaire incarnant le mal: le néolibéralisme.
>
> [an adversary that is evil incarnate : neoliberalism].[79]

Despite the force of Ehrenberg's general study, hard evidence that autonomy at work has actually increased in recent decades remains open to challenge. According to an EU-wide survey of 29,000 workers (of whom 3,000 were in France), the French Labour Ministry statistical division, Dare*s*, concludes that the autonomy of workers in France is actually decreasing, and this may well be another source of psychological malaise.[80] In this study, French workers reported increasing management control over their work and their emotional needs, as well as 'des conflits de valeurs' [conflict of values]. More than half of all workers surveyed said that they carried out complex work; while a third of these said they worked under pressure. There were also complaints about the intrusive nature of emails that have helped erode the distinction between working life and private life.

This pervasive sense of communal insecurity may have also increased because of recent changes in labour law (the so-called 'Loi El Khomri') which reduced statutory worker protections. Meanwhile, a 2016 *Edenred-Ipsos* survey, of 14,000 workers in fifteen countries, ranks France at number 12 out of 15 among the world's largest economies in terms of the quality of working conditions and the emotional state of workers. These results are said partly to reflect lack of respect for hierarchical structures – which may

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78 Lucie Davoine and Dominique Méda, *Place et sens du travail en Europe: une singularité française?* 2008. HAL Id: hal-00276220 <https://hal.archives-ouvertes.fr/hal-00276220> [accessed 19/06/2018].

79 Ehrenberg, *La société* (2010), p. 313.

80 Les facteurs de risques psychosociaux en France et en Europe: Une comparaison à travers l'enquête européenne sur les conditions de travail, *Dares analyses* No. 100, 12/2014 [online] <https://dares.travail-emploi.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/2014-100.pdf> [accessed 29/11/2018].

lead to confusion, stress, bullying, weak solidarity among colleagues, limited interest in the work itself and even difficulties with work/life balance.[81]

Paradoxically, sociologist, Rolande Pinard, believes that job insecurity brings benefits as well as costs for the individual:

> La précarisation de l'emploi présente en ce sens une dialectique potentiellement émancipatrice : elle reflète une incapacité des (non)salariés d'agir collectivement pour combattre l'exploitation; mais elle peut aussi être l'occasion d'échapper à l'assujettissement à un employeur, de le mettre à sa place: un dépendant et un bénéficiaire du travail.
>
> [The precarious nature of employment presents in this sense a potentially emancipatory interaction: this reflects an inability of (non)workers to act collectively to combat exploitation; but it can also be an opportunity to escape being subjected by an employer, to put this latter in their place: both a dependent and a beneficiary of work].[82]

This notion may hold up in the short term when a worker has just lost their job following constant bullying. However, as time passes, it seems likely that the challenge of finding fresh employment, particularly in a depressed economy with a negative reference from your previous employer, or none at all, will take precedence in the individual's mind.

Another major piece in this already complex puzzle is the role of legislation and evolving case law. The very public debate about the nature of work and workplace bullying in contemporary France, is based, in particular, on the arguments elegantly expounded by Hirigoyen and Dejours, derived from their experiences of treating patients who feel they have been psychologically maltreated at work. This work led to the passage in 2001 of specific legislation on 'le harcèlement moral'. This was made a criminal offence, currently punishable by up to two years' imprisonment and a

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[81] La loi El Khomri expliquée en une minute, *Lepoint.fr* 05/04/2016 [online] <https://www.lepoint.fr/economie/la-loi-el-khomri-expliquee-en-une-minute-05-04-2016-2030253_28.php> [accessed 29/11/2018]. See also : Marion Peroud, Bien-être au travail: pourquoi la France est à la traîne, *challenges.fr*, 25/05/2015 [online] <https://www.challenges.fr/emploi/management/bien-etre-au-travail-pourquoi-la-france-est-a-la-traine_19434> [accessed 29/11/2018].

[82] Pinard, *La précarisation de l'emploi* (2011).

30,000-euro fine.[83][84][85][86] This legislation is notable because it is unlike that in most other EU countries, the UK and the USA – and the ongoing publicity surrounding court decisions is potentially a factor influencing the continued interest in stories in this area.[87]

French legislation on ‘le harcèlement moral’ builds on well-established legal provisions on employment protection. Statutory protection against unfair dismissal has long been embedded in the French Labour Code. However, protection for those individuals suffering injustices at work *short of* unlawful termination by the employer were lacking, with no recognition either of related individual psychological trauma. In practice, the full rigour of unfair dismissal protection covers only those workers with open-ended full-time contracts and not the growing numbers of workers who, driven by business needs for greater labour market flexibility, are today employed on temporary or fixed-term contracts and so have less protection.[88]

In trying to provide protections for workers suffering prejudice short of dismissal, legislators focused pragmatically on workers employed under all forms of contract, that is, regardless of their duration and weekly hours required, while prohibiting actions that were repeated and that could be evidenced by their very visibility. Over time this has come to include not just physical violence with an identifiable perpetrator, but also systemic violence articulated through written rules and procedures and/or customary use of derogatory oral expressions across an organisation aimed at undermining workers, such as mocking, and sarcastic comments. Today, the legislation clearly encompasses psychological violence defined as repeated acts with a demonstrable pattern of malice aimed at demeaning, dominating and coercing individuals that is, the very type of workplace bullying analysed in this chapter.

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[83] Christophe Dejours, *Souffrance en France: La banalisation de l’injustice sociale* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1998).

[84] Hirigoyen, *Le harcèlement moral* (1998).

[85] *Code du travail*, Article L1152 [online] <https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichCode.do?idSectionTA=LEGISCTA000006177845&cidTexte=LEGITEXT000006072050> [accessed 19/04/2020].

[86] *Code pénal*, Article 222-33-2 [online] <https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichCode.do;jsessionid=35D5E61D2014ED0762D7B671D1222A98.tplgfr28s_3?idSectionTA=LEGISCTA000006165282&cidTexte=LEGITEXT000006070719&dateTexte=20190902> [accessed 09/10/2018].

[87] Belgium appears to be one of the few EU exceptions because it also recognises workplace bullying in law. Dominique Rulkin, Définition du harcèlement moral, *Le psychologue.be* [online] <https://www.lepsychologue.be/articles/harcelement-moral-definition-loi-belgique.php> [accessed 09/10/2018]. Meanwhile, in the UK, for instance, only specific forms of harassment are unlawful. They include unwanted behaviour, among other things, relating to age, sex and disability.

[88] Le licenciement d’un salarié en cdd, jurifiable par justifit, [online] <https://www.jurifiable.com/conseil-juridique/droit-du-travail/licenciement-cdd> [accessed 03/01/2020].

The French Labour Code places a duty on employers to guarantee the safety of employees. It also requires workplace risks to be combatted at their source and places an obligation on employers to adapt work processes accordingly.[89] The definition of bullying in law covers degradation of working conditions capable of damaging workers' rights and dignity and compromising physical or mental health or job prospects.[90]

Given the general nature of the statutory provisions, the French courts have had to examine what constitutes workplace bullying on a case-by-case basis, while building up a set of legal precedents. Part of the challenge for the courts is that the way bullying is understood by a target is not necessarily uniform, that is, individuals do not always experience bullying behaviour in the same way. So, for instance, one worker might take a disparaging comment about their favourite football team as a joke, while another might take it as an insult.[91]

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[89] <https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/telecharger_pdf.do?cidTexte=LEGITEXT000006072050> [accessed 20/10/2017]. See also: Code pénal, Section 3 bis: Du harcèlement moral [online] <https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichCode.do;jsessionid=35D5E61D2014ED0762D7B671D1222A98.tplgfr28s_3?idSectionTA=LEGISCTA000006165282&cidTexte=LEGITEXT000006070719&dateTexte=20190902> [accessed 09/10/2018].

[90] There are also a host of supporting legal regulations, including national collective agreements signed by unions and employers' organisations and subsequently extended by law to cover all employers. The main provisions here are embodied in: the national 'interprofessionel' agreement on stress at work (signed 02/07/2008, enforceable in law 23/04/2009); the national interprofessionel agreement on bullying and violence at work (signed 26/03/2010, enforceable in law 23/07/2010); and the agreement on the prevention of 'risques psychosociaux' (RPS) in the public service. It should be noted that there is no specific statutory protection against RPS. This is regulated by the texts cited earlier and others that focus on bullying, stress and violence. These therefore cover both physical and mental suffering. See also : Patrice Adam, La prise en compte des risques psychosociaux par le droit du travail français, *Le Droit Ouvrier* (06.2008), pp. 313–332.

Significantly, in a landmark judgement in 2009, the French Supreme Court set down the principle that 'harcèlement moral' can be characterised by management methods implemented by a line superior as long as they manifest themselves to a worker repeatedly with the object or effect of causing a deterioration of the conditions that may negatively affect their rights and dignity, impair their physical or mental health, or jeopardise their professional future.[92]

This overall approach by the courts leaves a number of key questions unresolved and means that:

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[91] In practice, we now know that 'harcèlement moral' as interpreted by the courts includes cases where: the perpetrator can be the organisation itself (as in the France Télécom case summarised in the Introduction), a manager, a peer or even the wife of a business owner. Meanwhile, bullying can involve exclusion from meetings, reduction in job responsibilities, unexpected transfer to another location, cutting a worker's telephone line or disconnecting their voicemail access, criticism/humiliation in front of colleagues and various actions intended to pressure a worker to resign. Alina Paragyios, Avocat, La jurisprudence concernant le harcèlement moral au travail: jurisprudence vivante. *village-justice.com*, 27/09/2017 [online] <https://www.village-justice.com/articles/jurisprudence-concernant-harcelement-moral-travail-jurisprudence-vivante,25979.html> [accessed 18/06/2019].

[92] Cass. Soc., 10/11/2009, n°07-45.321 [online] <https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichJuriJudi.do?idTexte=JURITEXT000021270312> [accessed 18/06/2019]. The French Supreme Court, over time, has broadened the legal definition of workplace bullying. For instance, it recently ruled that delay in paying wages can constitute bullying, depending on the causes and circumstances of such a delay. Cass. Soc., 7/4/2016, No.14-28.250 [online] <https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichJuriJudi.do?idTexte=JURITEXT000032391542> [accessed 18/06/2019]. Moreover, 'harcèlement moral' is often distinguished by a mixture of conduct, as with a worker who was downgraded, criticised unjustifiably for inadequate performance, subjected to aggressive and humiliating comments in front of colleagues, then pressured to resign. Cass. Soc., 11/07/2012, No.11-19.971 [online] <https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichJuriJudi.do?idTexte=JURITEXT000026189211> [accessed 18/06/2019].

> … aujourd'hui encore, la définition de la notion de harcèlement moral ne cesse de s'écrire.
>
> [… even today, the definition of what constitutes workplace bullying is still being written].[93]

Moreover, the scales of justice here are not equally balanced. In practice, as well as shouldering the burden of proof, workers alleging they are the targets of bullying are inevitably the weaker party. This is because, by applying to the courts for what they see as justice, they are likely identifying themselves to the organisation as 'troublemakers' or 'agitators'. This might well increase the potential for them to be subjected to (more) obtuse forms of coercion that are difficult to challenge in law. These could include managers deliberately not copying a worker in on relevant memos so that they fail to attend an important meeting. Such instances may be presented by organisations to the courts as acts necessitated by urgent or compelling business needs that do not constitute deliberate mistreatment because they were not (allegedly) intended as such. At one extreme, they may be classified as instances of the organisation 'forgetting' to re-establish the *status quo ante* once a particular emergency has passed. On the other hand, these actions may be analogous to the concept of 'placardisation' defined by Dominique Lhuilier as:

> une éviction du travail et le maintien de l'emploi.
>
> [… depriving individuals of work while their employed status is maintained …][94]

In neither case is there a direct threat to dismiss the worker, but the conditions may have been created for the worker themselves to decide to resign.

While the law is clearly having an impact on workplace bullying practices in France, it remains the subject of much debate which, perhaps, provides fuel for storytelling narratives. Hirigoyen contends that the 2001 legislation actually encourages institutional bullying because definitive evidence of such practices is often hard to uncover in a working environment where management language is deliberately nuanced.[95] Meanwhile, Yves Clot and Michel Gollac contend that, in practice, many organisations have indeed successfully shielded themselves from criticisms of workplace bullying. They contend that there is now a complete and permanent defensive structure in place across French business which provides a medical/legal bulwark to protect organisations against claims that their policies and processes are putting workers under risk of psychosocial trauma. As part of this framework, the role of the State is consigned to providing sickness compensation without actually addressing the root causes of the problem. Clot and Gollac argue with conviction that these causes include constant organisational change which disregards individual worker needs.

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[93] Claire Bensasson, Avocate, Harcèlement moral: de l'importance de la jurisprudence. *village-justice.com*, 13/06/2018 [online] <https://www.village-justice.com/articles/harcelement-moral-importance-jurisprudence,28747.html> [accessed 01/07/2019].

[94] Lhuilier, *Placardisés* (2002), p. 7.

The French Supreme Court, over time, has broadened the definition of what constitutes bullying within the law. For instance, it recently ruled that delay in paying wages can constitute bullying, depending on the causes and circumstances of such a delay.[96] Moreover, 'harcèlement moral' is often distinguished by a mixture of conduct, as with a worker who was downgraded, criticised unjustifiably for inadequate performance, subjected to aggressive and humiliating comments in front of colleagues, then pressured to resign.[97]

There is also ample evidence, including the 2019 Supreme Court case involving France Télécom, summarised in the Introduction, to suggest that taking one's own life can be a direct consequence of workplace bullying. Such desperate action may therefore be considered as part of the French socio-economic landscape. However, unlike bullying, that has no simple definition, that can be invisible to third parties and is ultimately defined by targets, suicide is a despairing and irrevocable act whose outcome is evidently visible. The scale of the French situation is illustrated from an international comparative perspective in Table 2.

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[95] My research interview with Marie-France Hirigoyen, Paris, 19/09/2018.

[96] Cass. Soc., 07/04/ 2016, No.14-28.250 [online] <https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichJuriJudi.do?idTexte=JURITEXT000032391542> [accessed 18/06/2019.

[97] Cass. Soc., 11/07/2012, No.11-19.971 [online] <https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichJuriJudi.do?idTexte=JURITEXT000026189211> [accessed 18/06/2019].

Table 2. International suicide rates (per 100,000 population per year)

Rank	Country	Males	Females	Year
18	France	27.5	9.1	2003
43	USA	17.9	4.2	2002
62	UK	10.8	3.3	2004

suicide.org. [online] <http://www.suicide.org/international-suicide-statistics.html> [accessed 19/10/2017].

Other country rankings include: Lithuania (1), Japan (9), China (12), Belgium (14), Finland (16).

As Sarah Waters explains:

> France has experienced what the international media has described as a 'suicide epidemic' in the workplace with rising numbers of employees choosing to kill themselves in the face of extreme pressures at work. Suicides have affected a wide range of companies, including the telecommunications giant, France Télécom (rebranded Orange in 2013); car manufacturers, Renault and Peugeot; French postal services; electricity and gas suppliers; banks; supermarkets; police force and research centres.[98]

The response of the media, legislators, the courts and some business organisations, implies a direct link between suicide and institutionalised organisational bullying. However, this is too complicated an issue to have a single driver. For instance, suicide is sometimes linked to personal psychological challenges, such as bipolar disorder, and can also be connected to family history.[99] There is an extensive social science literature on suicide that reveals these complexities.[100]

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[98] Sarah Waters, "Suicide Voices: Testimonies of Trauma in the French Workplace, Introduction," *Medical Humanities* 43, no. 1 (March 2017): pp. 24–29. <https://doi.org/10.1136/medhum-2016-011013> [online] <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5378294/pdf/emss-69859.pdf> [accessed 19/10/2017].

[99] Madeline Sharples, *Leaving the Hall Light On: A Mother's Memoir of Living with Her Son's Bipolar Disorder and Surviving His Suicide* (Downers Grove, IL: Dream of Things, 2012).

[100] Historically this runs from Émile Durkheim's landmark sociological study on the link between suicide and religion, to Sarah Waters' recent work on 'testimonies of

Towards a typology of workplace bullying

This discussion has already examined the main underlying reasons for the changes in the nature of workplace bullying under neoliberalism, with a shift from the physical to the psychological. We can now draw all these strands together, in order critically to synthesise their fundamental elements and establish a typology of workplace bullying to be used throughout the remainder of this study to analyse particular stories.

On the one hand, it can be asserted that under industrial capitalism, physical violence often appears to have been accepted as habitual and its casual nature could lead to the predictable maiming of workers. For instance, at French vehicle manufacturer, Renault, local management directly witnessed shortages of protective equipment but ignored the consequences so that:

> Écrasées. Écrabouillées, Broyées … Il y avait eu 776 accidents aux forges l'année passée, ça continuait et la direction faisait toujours la sourde oreille.
>
> [Crushed. Smashed, Shattered … There were 776 accidents at the forges last year, and the situation continued, with management still turning a deaf ear …].[101]

In her memoir of her father's career at Renault, Martine Sonnet describes how many of these workers died or suffered sight loss, emphysema and pleurisy, while some were forced to quit before the normal retirement age of 65.

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trauma in the French workplace'. Émile Durkheim, *Le Suicide* (Paris: Flammarion, 2014) Originally published 1897. Sarah Waters, "Suicide Voices: Testimonies of Trauma in the French Workplace," *Medical Humanities* 43, no. 1: pp. 24–29. [online] <https://doi.org/10.1136/medhum-2016-011013> [accessed 06/04/2020]. This trend suggests a propensity to despair may be aggravated by psychological violence and working in a neoliberal environment. This is also an issue developed extensively in fictional storytelling – in particular the Silhol's film, *Corporate* (2017), and Ledun's novel, *Les visages écrasé*s (2011).

[101] Martine Sonnet, *Atelier 62*, Chapter XVII Accidents (Bazas: Le temps qu'il fait), p. 123.

Today, however, across large swathes of global business, manufacturing processes and decision-making are mediated by digital technology, while the geographical location of managers, who impose and continually assess delivery against performance standards is, to a great extent, irrelevant. Among other things, increasing numbers of repetitive, process-driven tasks that previously involved health and safety risks for workers, have now been automated, while organisations distinguish themselves less by their ability perfectly to reproduce manufactured units than to create and innovate through highly prized knowledge workers who have become their core assets.[102]

In the meantime, routine psychological violence appears to proliferate in workplaces with technologically enhanced, process-driven jobs, such as in call centres or warehouses, where strictly enforced performance standards and the threat of dismissal, especially for workers on temporary contracts, are ever present.[103,104] For instance, in 2013, the US-online business, Amazon, was criticised for tagging its employees using GPS trackers in a UK warehouse.[105] As technology becomes more sophisticated, neoliberalism's desire to monitor and control business operations at arms-length can only intensify. A recent London exhibition provided several glimpses of this including a display of Motorola's WT41N0 Wearable Terminal or what curators labelled:

> The hands-free computer that keeps tabs on employees

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102 Chapter 4 seeks to demonstrate in detail, how such workers, may well find themselves physically pampered rather than treated with a lack of dignity as a way of encouraging, or conceivably, coercing, them to improve performance.

103 Ayesha Khalid and Shehla Ahmed, "Prevalence of Stress among Call Center Employees," *Pakistan Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology* 11, no. 2 (2013): pp. 58–62 [online] <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/308203140_Prevalence_of_Stress_among_Call_Center_Employees> [accessed 07/03/2019].

104 Max Zahn and Sharif Paget, "'Colony of Hell': 911 Calls from Inside Amazon Warehouses," *The Daily Beast* 03/11/2019 [online] <https://www.thedailybeast.com/amazon-the-shocking-911-calls-from-inside-its-warehouses> [accessed 13/03/2019].

105 Sarah Waters and Marina Karanikolos, "When Work Kills," *Journal of Public Mental Health* (November 2016): pp. 229–234 [online] <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/311419223> [accessed 11/10/2019].

This is the model used by Amazon and the UK retailer, Tesco, which:

> allocates tasks to warehouse workers and confirms their completion. Staff use an attached finger-mounted scanner or a voice-controlled headset to record activity, receiving immediate feedback if an error is made.[106]

There is little room for individual discretion and freedom of thought here. The worker merely responds robotically to electronic commands throughout the working day.

Bernie Chun Nam Mak and Erika Darics argue such technology is likely to encourage psychological violence in other ways, that is

> … colleagues exchanging written digital messages can use the channel to perform swearing in a light-hearted, playful way, and thus avoid face-to-face confrontation and being accused of verbal aggression in professional contexts.[107]

Writing in the mid-1970s onwards, that is, from the approaching dawn of the neoliberal age, French sociologist, Pierre Bourdieu, recognised that he was witnessing a shift away from visible physical workplace bullying to a form of *symbolic violence*, that is, the exercise of power psychologically rather than physically by individuals in a way that focuses on methods of domination, tacitly accepted by the target, because of their coercive nature, so that such actions become unconscious and entrenched. They also determine the relative position of both parties in the organisation as dominant and dominated.[108]

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[106] *The Future Starts Here Exhibition*, Victoria and Albert Museum, London, 6/10/ 2018 – 4/11/ 2018. Information card no. 13.

[107] Bernie Chun Nam Mak and Erika Darics, "Swearing and Instant Messaging: Changing Norms of Social Interaction in the Hong Kong Workplace Context," in *Advances in Swearing Research: New Languages, New Contexts*, eds K. B. Fagersten and K. Stapleton (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2017), pp. 43–64 [online] <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/319066030_Swearing_and_instant_messaging_Changing_norms_of_social_interaction_in_the_Hong_Kong_workplace_context> [accessed 18/03/2019].

[108] David L. Swartz, *Symbolic Power, Politics and Intellectuals: The Sociology of Pierre Bourdieu* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013).

The notion of *symbolic power* reflects the often small and subtle ways that individuals exert influence over one another in societies (including neoliberal organisations as closed systems) where that power is distributed unequally, so it shapes and reshapes beliefs, values and desires through domination. Among other things, Bourdieu argues, such power is manifestly translated into *symbolic violence* as: custom and practice, that is, the social order which has developed arbitrarily to justify past actions; hierarchical order; personal disposition, including overwhelming self-belief in a bully's superiority; and cultural resources – such as the 'capital' individuals invest in organisations through their economic interests, social connections and valued qualifications, and expertise. Language is also deployed to secure social control and legitimise the established social order through the use of words to communicate a specific meaning, the tone employed, status symbols (such as award badges) and body language.[109]

Symbolic power therefore influences our actions and fundamental assumptions about how we see the world and the way we think. It is translated into symbolic violence because of the way perpetrators chose to behave and may be independent of the way the organisation as a collective entity sees itself as operating.

In Bourdieu's terminology this is exercised as non-material and non-physical actions where the dominant communicates to those they dominate. Such power resides in particular structured areas or 'fields' of conflict where individual action is constrained by the positions held by individuals – for instance as managers and workers in a neoliberal organisation. Such 'fields' may in turn be subdivided into hierarchical, vocational and departmental subsets, including as finance and sales departments, each having their own particular cultural features enforced by their individual managers who may compete for organisational status or resources.

Bourdieu argues that symbolic violence, at least initially, may be misunderstood or misrecognised by the dominated who do not initially comprehend it as such until it is repeated and becomes regular. Those principles that define what actions are permissible, including what can be said, are labelled 'doxa' by Bourdieu.

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[109] Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1991).

Further, exercising such power may bring with it the ability to exert symbolic violence on third parties, such as co-workers who, witnessing the bullying of a colleague, remain silent for fear of being themselves targeted. Such a response legitimises the prevailing social order which may not reflect the organisation's formal hierarchy – as where the bully is a subordinate jealous of a former colleague's promotion to manager.

Symbolic power and violence can only hold sway where individuals allow themselves to be dominated because they fear loss of employment more than loss of dignity and self-respect. However, mental pressures, which can lead to physical as well as psychological illness, allow the dominant to impose their views on others without the brute force one finds in a totalitarian environment. Bourdieu uses the term 'habitus' to describe the internalised ways in which we each unconsciously perceive and evaluate the structures of the 'field' in which we operate.

Bourdieu also recognises that existing power relationships within a particular 'field' are dynamic and can be reversed in times of crisis so that relatively weak or dominated groups can upturn the social order.[110]

Further, Bourdieu's concepts are inter-related. Most notably, 'habitus', the way the individual sees the social world they inhabit, ultimately produces and is produced by the 'field' – the organisation in which each individual operates as well as their formal position and the 'capital' they bring to the organisation. There is therefore a constant dialectical tension between these concepts.

Matthieu Poirot, among others, suggests that workplace bullying follows a distinct pattern which entirely reflects Bourdieu's approach to symbolic violence.[111] Once having identified a target, the bully typically starts with small, practically invisible, negative actions, such as jokes about the individual's surname or the alleged smell of their work clothes. Once a bully has established that the organisation appears to have turned a blind eye to their behaviour (because it is unseen, ignored by others or even perceived as acceptable), bullies are then emboldened and their actions may become visible, perhaps including drawing hideous cartoons of the target or leaving them 'post-it' notes with abusive, sarcastic messages.

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[110] Pierre Bourdieu, *Esquisse d'une théorie de la pratique, précédée de trois études d'ethnologie Kabyle* (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1972), p. 330.

[111] Matthieu Poirot, *Le mobbing ou harcèlement collectif au travail. Psychologie positive au travail*, 2014 <http://psychologiepositiveautravail.blogspot.co.uk/> [accessed 15/05/18].

Next, the bully may actively seek to isolate and exclude the target by systematically stigmatising them through such actions as ignoring their existence and malicious gossip. The bully also starts threatening and may even transition from psychological to physical violence. Finally, the individual target, consumed with guilt and shame about their alleged personal failings, and stigmatised by the organisation for being different, resigns or is dismissed for incapability. They suffer psychosocial trauma that can lead to the breakup of personal relationships, long-term illness and, in extreme instances, suicide.

Alternatively, targets may believe they need their job too much to resign, so they do their best to remain in the organisation and get by – for the time being at least. Either way, these individuals suffer an enormous mental ordeal and their confidence and emotional stability have been seriously undermined for many years, if not for life. Ultimately, much depends on the organisation's willingness and capability to identify and address the issue.

So, there is an initial triggering event, usually followed by small instances where it is difficult to determine the precise nature of the bully's actions (except perhaps in retrospect as a pattern of events). This very much supports Marie-France Hirigoyen's experience.[112] Targets then adopt defensive behaviours where, because they feel under pressure, they are prone to make mistakes. Subsequently, the HR department becomes involved. This is usually well after the event and is likely to reveal HR as:

> impuissante et dépassée par la gravité de la situation.
>
> [… powerless and overstretched by the gravity of the situation …][113]

Given how responsibility is pushed down to individuals in neoliberal organisations, HR's simplest response may be to declare that workers brought bullying on themselves, that is, it was justified insofar as the worker had been clearly behaving contrary to the needs of the business. The individual who is then frustrated and aggrieved subsequently gains a reputation for being a 'problem worker', falls out with work colleagues and resigns, taking with them a negative psychological experience of work that will impact on them in the future. The individual then finds it difficult to gain further employment, or to keep a job when one is offered. In some cases, this situation can lead to the need for psychiatric therapy. There are elements of such incidents in Chanard and Vautier's fictional experiences in the novel *Potentiel du sinistre* which is critically analysed in Chapter 4.[114]

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[112] Hirigoyen, *Malaise* (2003).

[113] Ada Garcia et al., *Violences au travail, harcèlement moral et sexuel*, SPF Emploi, Travail et Concertation sociale, Brussels, 2003, p. 17.

Danièle Linhart, along with other social science theorists, argues that it is in this environment that workers' suffering has increased, as managers and workers sometimes exhibit previously latent aggressive behaviours to satisfy the need to protect their own sense of self-value and their job security.[115] Christiane de Beaurepaire and Catherine Fayada hypothesise that we are all open to 'paranoïas situationnelles' which can come to the fore when faced some day by a 'détonateur' when we believe our sense of self is endangered.[116] We can see evidence of such symbolic violence in the film, *Trois huit* and the novel, *L'homme qui aimait trop travailler*.[117]

The notion of symbolic violence suggests that, in contemporary organisations, power exerted through the mental processes of persuasion, influence and negotiation can be more, rather than less, effective than physical coercion within an authoritarian context. At the extreme, symbolic violence may become accepted as inherent or normalised behaviour across an entire 'field', so embodying a generalised 'right' of domination within a particular social order, including a complete neoliberal organisation. This is therefore the phenomenon of institutionalised or *systemic violence*.

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[114] Thomas Coppey, *Potentiel du sinistre* (Arles: Actes sud, 2013).

[115] Danièle Linhart, *La comédie humaine* (2015).

[116] Christiane de Beaurepaire and Catherine Fayada, *Réactions paranoïaques au travail: expérience de la consultation medico – psychologique d'une entreprise de transport ferroviaire, implications cliniques, pathogéniques et professionnelles*, 2016 [online] <http://www.souffrance-et-travail.com/media/pdf/S&T_ReactionsParanoiaquesAuTravail.pdf> [accessed 04/12/2018].

[117] Both these stories are critically analysed as follows.

In developing a typology of workplace bullying, it is important to acknowledge that as neoliberalism has evolved over the decades since Bourdieu first developed the concept of symbolic violence, a more sophisticated and altogether darker form of psychological bullying has evolved, labelled systemic violence by Slovenian philosopher, Slavoj Žižek, in his critic of contemporary society. Žižek contends that modern society can only operate smoothly by permitting such behaviour.[118] From an organisational perspective systemic violence is able to seize and maintain an entire workforce within its net of compliance and subjugation. This insidious, subtle and deeply embedded form of psychological coercion and domination arises where malevolent management conduct has become routinised to the extent that it is acknowledged as simply a fact of daily life by workers, right across an organisation, who feel emotionally imprisoned. These workers have concluded that shouldering the burden of such violence is their only option if they are to remain in employment, albeit by enduring ongoing psychological persecution. As Žižek argues, this phenomenon of systemic violence may be considered a substratum of symbolic violence. It also has echoes of the totalitarianism created by the Nazis in the first half of the twentieth century.[119]

This analysis, therefore, provides a typology of violence summarised in Figure 2, adapted from Žižek and Bourdieu.

The model posits a classification for analysing social behaviour in organisations which demonstrates insights into the contrary nature of human action, reaction and interaction. In this model, *subjective violence* is generally direct physical bullying where individual targets are under visible threat from a known assailant, such as a manager or colleague. Next, symbolic violence, in line with Bourdieu's theoretical ideas, can be oral or written, ranging from face-to-face mockery or shunning of one individual by another. Such psychological pressure undermines individual self-belief. This might include verbal threats by a particular manager directed at a single subordinate in order to subjugate the latter.

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[118] Žižek, *Violence* (2008).

[119] Arendt, *Banality of Evil* (1963).

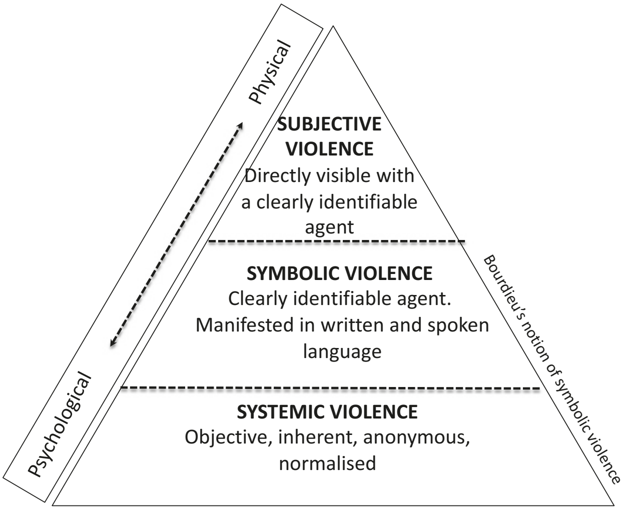
Physical
Psychological
SUBJECTIVE VIOLENCE
Directly visible with a clearly identifiable agent
SYMBOLIC VIOLENCE
Clearly identifiable agent. Manifested in written and spoken language
SYSTEMIC VIOLENCE
Objective, inherent, anonymous, normalised
Bourdieu's notion of symbolic violence

Figure 2. Towards a typology of workplace bullying

However, where these spoken or written words and their application are so widespread as to become the norm across the organisation because they are actively part of everyone's daily life, we can say that they represent systemic violence. Violence can therefore be symbolic without being systemic. Yet, once it becomes actively generalised or normalised it transforms itself into systemic violence, a fundamental part of the very atoms of an organisation and so more deeply rooted institutionally than symbolic violence. Systemic violence may, therefore, not just be defined by prejudice and discrimination against others, but by the unshaped, ill-considered fears of the unknown, enveloped in a dark organisational discourse that stimulates such views and beliefs and penetrates every aspect of organisational behaviour.

According to Žižek:

> … systemic violence […] is inherent in the social conditions of global capitalism, which involve the 'automatic creation of excluded and disposable individuals from the homeless to the unemployed …'[120]

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[120] Žižek, *Violence* (2008), p. 12.

He argues that such violence comprises the most subtle forms of coercion that sustain relations of domination and exploitation, including an underlying sense of threat underpinned by:

> the self-propelling metaphysical dance of capital that runs the show, that provides the key to real-life development and catastrophes.[121]

This dark perspective is reflected in many of the stories covered by this study, including the film *Corporate*, where senior executives coalesce spontaneously, seemingly without any qualms and contrary to any real evidence, to build a case that a worker's suicide results not from the application of intrinsically malevolent organisational people policies, but from his personal misfortunes outside the workplace.[122]

Žižek borrows from Lacan's distinction between 'reality', that is, what we see in the activities and processes workers are involved in on a daily basis; and 'the Real', that is, the entirely abstract 'spectral logic' of capital that governs what we witness at the level of social reality, such as stock markets trading on futures.[123] This is the level at which systemic violence operates. As individuals immersed in the rough-and-tumble of daily life, we are frequently unaware of this deeper actuality or deliberately ignore it because it personally threatens our way of life, generates fear and, if we were to face it head on, could leave us socially exposed as part of the Other – those disadvantaged individuals who we perceive we have risen above socially and/or professionally through our own efforts or entitlement. Paradoxically, we recognise the unfairness of this division, but to address it effectively might well strip us of our economic and social advantages. This is the great contradiction of systemic violence. We know it exists but fail to do anything about it.[124]

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[121] Žižek, *Violence* (2008), p. 11.

[122] Silhol, *Corporate* (2017).

[123] Dylan Evans, *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis* (London: Routledge, 1996).

[124] In the 2017 documentary film *Complicit*, a terminally ill worker with leukaemia, tries to change dangerous working conditions at the Chinese smart phone screen manufacturer, Foxconn, which lists Apple and Samsung among its clients. Foxconn and the Chinese government both argue there is full compliance with domestic law. However, it is clear to spectators that the wave of sickness at Foxconn results

In order to understand the practical nature of systemic violence, Žižek seeks to answer the important question of why it exists in modern society. He contends that today we live in a world where 'old ideological struggles' no longer seem relevant and where society relies on 'expert management and administration' to manage the way it operates. Consequently, 'the efficient management of life' (including extensive use of measurement in the workplace) has become our only objective. In this environment, the only way to introduce 'passion' (i.e. within the context of this study, profoundly to motivate workers) is to generate fear as 'the ultimate mobilising principle'.[125] For the modern worker, this means the threat of being excluded and/or branded as inefficient and incompetent. Such situations give rise to emotional suffering and pain for those actively targeted and may generate panic among bystanders, who fear they may be next. Thus, it is not only the directly bullied who are affected by psychological attacks on their dignity, but also witnesses and, in some cases, the individual perpetrators themselves if they are perceptive enough to recognise that the tables can be easily turned against themselves.

In addition, psychologist and psychoanalyst, Marie Grenier-Pezé, warns that attempts by individuals to defend themselves by merely echoing the organisation's espoused values can go awry and destroy their relationship with their work team. This is because such values:

> autorisent la banalisation du mal exercé sur autrui
>
> [… authorise the banality of evil to be imposed on others …].[126]

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from working conditions and that they, as distant observers who use electronic products (and may well be using them to view this film), are as much part of the problem as Foxconn, Apple and Samsung. This provides another clear example of systemic violence – an acceptable form of fear and threat generation that society is apparently prepared to tolerate. Dir: Heather White, Jialing Zhang, Lynn Zhang, *Complicit*, 2017.

[125] Žižek, *Violence* (2008), p. 34.

[126] Marie Grenier-Pezé, 'Petits meurtres entre amis'. Approche psychosomatique et psychodynamique du harcèlement moral au travail, Perspectives interdisciplinaires sur le travail et la santé [online], *Pistes* 7–5, 2005, <https//journals.openedition.org/pistes/3191> [accessed 04/12/2018].

However, targets can, at least in part, find some comfort by engaging doctors, psychologists and legal experts who can help them regain:

> respect et dénonce les atteintes à la dignité, appelant à cette réparation.
>
> [… respect and denounce violations of their dignity, while calling for redress …].[127]

In the final analysis, however, Grenier-Pezé concludes that it is difficult to see what reparations can adequately compensate a worker for job loss, mental and/or physical illness, as well as loss of the meaning of work.[128]

Concluding comments

This chapter examined how storytelling on workplace bullying provides a unique contribution to the public debate in this area. It argued that audiences engage with evolving stories of individual workplace suffering that may echo their own lived experiences as bullying targets or as bystanders. It contended that stories provide a countervailing narrative to corporate messaging with its insistence on the common interests of capital and labour and incorporation of implied or explicit stipulations about coercion and control of individual behaviour. The chapter then examined a range of structural, social and cultural factors, including recent legislation, that when combined, strongly suggest why workplace bullying – as mainly a psychological rather than a physical activity – has come to the fore in public debate in contemporary France and has attracted the interests of so many creative writers and directors.

By synthesising the key elements of this discussion, it is possible to conclude that these stories, as a whole, provide a distinct 'locus of storytelling'.

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[127] Marie Grenier-Pezé, Paul Bouaziz, La notion de harcèlement dans le travail: réparation ou reconnaissance de la souffrance au travail? Travailler 2003/1 (n 9), pp. 189–205, cairn.info [online] <https://www.cairn.info/revue-travailler-2003-1-page-189.htm> [accessed 01/12/2019].

[128] Grenier-Pezé, *Petits meutres* (2005).

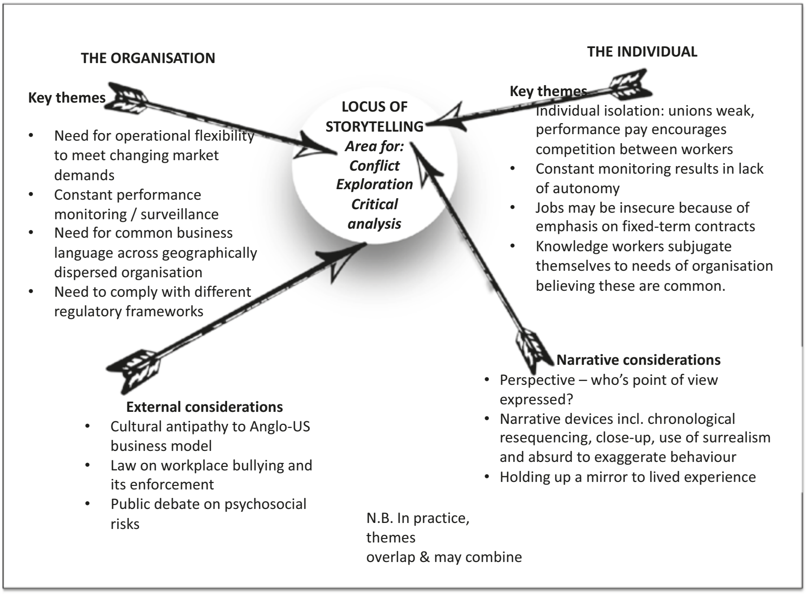
THE ORGANISATION
Key themes
Need for operational flexibility to meet changing market demands
Constant performance monitoring / surveillance
Need for common business language across geographically dispersed organisation
Need to comply with different regulatory frameworks
THE INDIVIDUAL
Key themes
Individual isolation: unions weak, performance pay encourages competition between workers
Constant monitoring results in lack of autonomy
Jobs may be insecure because of emphasis on fixed-term contracts
Knowledge workers subjugate themselves to needs of organisation believing these are common.
LOCUS OF STORYTELLING
Area for:
Conflict
Exploration
Critical analysis
External considerations
Cultural antipathy to Anglo-US business model
Law on workplace bullying and its enforcement
Public debate on psychosocial risks
Narrative considerations
Perspective – who's point of view expressed?
Narrative devices incl. chronological resequencing, close-up, use of surrealism and absurd to exaggerate behaviour
Holding up a mirror to lived experience
N.B. In practice, themes overlap & may combine

Figure 3. Psychological violence in French workplace fiction: themes and considerations

This is set out graphically in Figure 3. This model provides a common framework for understanding the focus and scope of the fictional narratives all of which examine individual lived experiences of workplace bullying. It is suggested that, by drawing together various shared ideas across these stories, audiences are better able to examine these stories in a consistent manner and better appreciate that at their core there exists a divergence between the way the organisation sees the world of work and the perspectives of individual employees. Furthermore, this contradiction leads to psychological suffering for individuals.

Finally, on the basis of this analysis, this chapter posited a typology based on the works of Bourdieu and Žižek for critically examining stories in the remainder of this study.

The following chapters seek to scrutinise in depth the notion of psychological violence, each with specific reference to several stories. This analysis is intended to provide a detailed and practical demonstration of how works of the imagination can illuminate the lived experiences of contemporary workers in a range of contexts and continue to test the hypothesis that workplace fiction, especially on bullying, provides a counter to the 'dark' communications that seem inherent in corporate messaging.

CHAPTER 2

Systemic violence: The organisation as bully

> BLACKBERRYWOMAN: Vous êtes mort professionnellement … On te fait douter, on ne note plus tes propositions, on t'isole, on te prive de bureau dans le même temps et on te dit comme ça, un matin, dans le creux d'un couloir, dans un air courant entre deux portes ouvertes.
>
> [You're finished from the point of job prospects … They sow doubt in your mind, they don't take any notice of your ideas anymore, they isolate you, they take your office from you; just like that, one morning at the end of a hallway, where there's a draught between two open doors].[1]

This chapter is a direct continuation of Chapter 1. As such, it aims to examine in detail the phenomenon of systemic violence in the contemporary French workplace through a critical analysis of four fictional stories. It therefore takes as its starting point Slavoj Žižek's notion of systemic violence introduced in the previous chapter, that is, routinised or institutionalised psychological bullying within neoliberalism applied specifically to workplace relations.[2]

These four stories all give representation to the powerlessness of individuals to combat such bullying and explore its human consequences.[3] In particular, the stories reveal how systemic violence can manifest itself in many ways, including through: management denial that some organisational policies implicitly harm workers; social class discrimination; stripping a job of its content; and overt game playing. All these activities may be underpinned by explicit or implicit/ 'dark' organisational messaging imbedded in values statements, HR policies and internal structure charts.

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[1] Sylvain Levey, *Au pays des*, in *Comme des mouches, pièces politiques* (Montreuil: Éditions Théàtrales, 2011) Scene 7, pp. 45–46.

[2] Slavoj Žižek, *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections* (London: Profile Books, 2008).

[3] Pierre Bourdieu, *Les modes de domination*, Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales. Vol. 2, n°2–3, juin 1976, pp. 122–132 [online] <https://www.persee.fr/doc/arss_0335-5322_1976_num_2_2_3456> [accessed 15/01/2019].

Such actions support institutional domination and worker compliance. They also drive the implementation and operation of universal performance standards and digital measurement, that continually pressurise individuals.

This chapter therefore examines those insidious, subtle and deeply-imbedded forms of psychological coercion and submission where the perpetrator is not an individual but the organisation itself, and where, at the extreme, such malevolent conduct has become institutionalised to the extent that it is acknowledged as simply a fact of daily life by workers who may feel emotionally imprisoned, psychologically persecuted and isolated.

As Danièle Linhart argues such routinised violence stems from:

> L'arrogance … [qui] est en effet prétendre savoir ce qui est bien pour tous, parler au nom de tous, au nom du bien commun. C'est refuser la légitimité d'autres valeurs, d'autres prismes pour aborder ce bien commun.
>
> [Arrogance … [which] is in effect claiming to know what is good for everyone, to speak for everyone, in the name of the common good. It is to refuse the legitimacy of other values, of other perspectives to reflect on this common good.][4]

These sentiments echo in tone the fictional quote in the epigraph to this chapter from a play by Sylvain Levey. Such organisational behaviour would include France Télécom's widespread adoption and misapplication of the so-called 'courbe du deuil' ['mourning curve'], used by organisations to promote psychological stress and encourage worker resignations without the company falling foul of unfair dismissal law and being liable for associated compensation costs.[5] This tool was originally devised by Swiss psychiatrist Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, not as a business management instrument, but as a way of helping terminally ill patients mentally to adjust to news of their impending death. However, when applied uncritically to a workplace environment, it plausibly represents a form of systemic violence which assumes the inevitability of a negative reaction to an impending event (such as job cuts) and therefore normalises acceptance of psychological trauma. In practice, this means that the suffering worker is left emotionally isolated by the organisation with little or no palliative care, while managers, who view the curve as a kind of biblical credo, look on passively as the process moves inexorably forward.

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[4] Danièle Linhart, La comédie humaine du travail (Toulouse: Érès, 2015), p. 56.

[5] Sylvie Petit-Fontaine, Elisabeth Kübler-Ross – Le chemin de deuil, *Accompagnements de l'Être* [online] <https://toutpresdesoi.weebly.com/uploads/4/0/0/4/40045663/la-courbe-du-deuil-e-kubler-ross.pdf> [accessed 03/12/2019].

This chapter illustrates how such systemic violence is reflected in contemporary fiction about the modern commercial enterprise. The selected stories are two films, *Corporate* and *Ressources humaines*, and two plays, *Au pays des* and *Boxon(s) jusqu'à n'en plus pouvoir*, each of which demonstrates, in line with the critical work of Yves Clot, Michel Gollac, how systemic violence stems from fear, the threat of constant change and ceaseless performance improvement initiatives.[6]

These two films seek to represent how such dysfunctional practices operate from the perspective of actuality while theatre takes the same dark material and tends to view it from a surreal standpoint. Such an approach, far from presenting systemic violence as a hollow entertainment, emphasises its merciless cruelty.

Management deniability and the role of HR

As a general point, both these films and other stories subsequently analysed in this study, such as the novel, *Des clous*, which feature HR managers and directors, provide examples of a profound management culture of 'deniability' where bullying behaviour is not accepted for what it actually is by the offending organisation. This parallels the position taken by the senior managers at France Télécom who were prosecuted in the country's landmark test in 2019 of its legislation on 'harcèlement moral'.[7] This argument is supported by Susan Harrington's academic research in the UK involving individual discussions and focus groups with HR managers. She concludes that they view workers' grievances about bullying as lack of individual 'alignment' with organisational objectives and performance standards and/or permissible interpersonal conflict – even where the management conduct complained against is clearly bullying in an academic sense.[8]

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[6] Yves Clot and Michel Gollac, *Le travail: peut-il devenir supportable* (Paris: Armand Colin, 2017).

[7] Beynel and Robert, *La raison des plus* (2020), *Aveuglement managérial*, pp. 143–145.

As discussed in Chapter 1, the challenge for French legislators, managers and indeed workers, is that, until and unless all facets of bullying are proscribed in detail by law, there is no fixed universal position that defines such violence. Where this line is drawn on an operational basis remains a function of an organisation's history, values and culture, as well as broad societal norms. As the critical literature clearly demonstrates, this situation can create a toxic mixture in which the power of the few is well in excess of that of the many and there is constant pressure on all individuals to deliver increasingly higher standards of performance while the organisational structure and its processes metamorphose around them in response to changing market demands.[9]

Linhart contextualises this management view in a series of quotations from HR directors she encountered during a conference, one of whom declares with disdain that:

> '… il faut que les moutons soient convaincus … il faut créer les conditions d'émergence, il pourra subordonner son intérêt individuel à une cause qui le dépasse'
>
> [… the sheep need to be convinced … we need to create the conditions for their arrival, so that they can subordinate their individual interests to a cause that is greater than themselves].[10]

It seems probable that a culture of systemic violence can become so embracing that it encourages bullying, whether or not this is an individual manager's preferred style for achieving results. This is because, by its very nature, systemic violence is seductive. The perpetrator can feel empowered as it produces positive results for them, regardless of its negative impact on targets and bystanders. The very nature of systemic violence is that it is widespread, often subtle, often hidden from third parties, grudgingly accepted by workers as inevitable, and it therefore goes unpunished. This situation is rendered more complex when, as in a number of these stories, we witness a culture of socially aberrant behaviours driven by one or a handful of individuals (i.e. subjective and symbolic violence) which literally infects an entire organisation (i.e. it becomes systemic). This is the case for instance, in the novel, *Des clous*, and the play, *Les nouveaux barbares*. If organisations feel this is a problem they want to address, they are likely to face a long haul because it is not just workplace conduct that needs to change but also individual and abstract social attitudes about how we value others and regard ourselves. This is the ultimate challenge faced by HR manager, Emilie, in *Corporate*.

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[8] Susan Harrington, "Workplace Bullying through the Eyes of Human Resource Practitioners: A Bourdieusian Analysis" (PhD thesis, 2010) [online] <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/77050152.pdf> [accessed 08/06/2018].

[9] See for instance, Angel Ischmael and Bunmi Allemoru, "Chapter 5: Organisational Culture and Climate," in *Harassment, Bullying and Violence at Work* (London: The Industrial Society, 1999), pp. 127–146.

[10] Linhart, *La comédie* (2015), p. 33.

Several stories analysed across this study illustrate the inherently problematic position of management as agents of capital. For instance, HR professionals in both the film, *Corporate*, and the play, *Les nouveaux babares*, may be seen as representatives of the educated bourgeoisie. Whether designated as middle or senior management they struggle to find their place in a system where, in a reflection of Sartre's 1972 Marxist analysis on intellectuals, they may wish to see themselves as part of a ruling elite. However, in the final analysis, despite their personal intellectual capital in the form of educational diplomas and professional qualifications and indeed their capabilities, objectively they are still hired hands who remain more aligned to the working class – which distrusts and despises them. On the other hand, they may well find themselves patronised by business owners, that is, shareholders, with whom they aspire to be equal.[11]

As Vincent de Gaulejac puts it:

> Le manager, plus que tout autre, intériorise fortement la contradiction capital/travail. D'un côté, une identification forte à 'l'intérêt de l'entreprise', une intériorisation de la logique du profit, une adhésion aux normes et aux valeurs du système capitaliste; de l'autre, une condition salariale soumise aux aléas de la carrière, au risque du licenciement, à la pression du travail et à une compétition féroce.

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[11] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Situations VIII* (Paris: Gallimard, 1972), pp. 408–427.

> [Managers, more than any one, strongly internalise the capital/labour contradiction. On the one hand, they strong identify with the 'interests of the business', an internalisation of the logic of profit, an adherence to the norms and values of the capitalist system; on the other hand, they are paid a salary and are subject to the uncertainties associated with a career, risk of dismissal, pressure of work and fierce competition][12]

For instance, it is only when *Corporate's* HR manager, Emilie, accepts that she can no longer support the organisational view of the world, that she requires a rebalanced relationship with her employer that ultimately leads to her resignation. As Bourdieu expressed it:

> Les agents se déterminent par rapport à des indices concrets de l'accessible et de l'inaccessible, de 'pour nous' et du 'pas pour nous'.
>
> [Agents determine who they are and what they can do in relation to concrete indicators of what's accessible and what's inaccessible, of what's 'for us' and what's 'not for us'].[13]

This role conflict seems to be acutely inherent in the work of HR management who seek to strike a balance between undertaking the HR function's historical welfare or personnel role; while, on the other, they must act simultaneously as the primary enforcers for the organisation in the drafting and policing of people policies, processes and procedures that promote compliance and increased performance. Thus, in practice, they may feel obligated to act as a management/worker intermediary but recognise increasingly they are just workers. This debate plays out across this study in stories including *Corporate*, *Des clou*s and *Violence des échanges en milieu tempéré*. There appears to be some equivalence here with the ideas on slavery and oppression expressed by Albert Camus in his essay *L'Homme revolté*.[14] This is to say that, like slaves, as witnesses to workplace suffering, HR professionals may opt to remain subservient by continuing

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12 Vincent de Gaulejac, *La société malade de la gestion* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2005, 2009), p. 41.

13 Pierre Bourdieu, Les sens pratiques (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1980), p. 107.

14 Albert Camus, *L'Homme révolté* (Paris: Gallimard, 1951), p. 33 [online] <https://www.scribd.com/document/355266172/Camus-Albert-L-Homme-revolte-pdf> [accessed 27/10/2017].

to act exclusively as the employer's agent. Alternatively, as *Corporate* illustrates, they can exercise the right to protest and, in so doing, rob their 'masters' of power.

Studies by business schools and related academics appear to deal with this subject only to the extent that they acknowledge that the human resource management (HRM) function sometimes encounters ethical issues. However, they do not examine how the challenges faced by individuals within this function might be actually addressed. For instance, David Guest and Neil Conway contend that:

> Many ethical concerns about HRM can be posed as questions about the terms of exchange between employers and employees; in short, whether employees are getting a fair deal. However, the role of HRM within the organisation – what it does and what it ought (in a normative sense) to do – is also important. HRM, in short, can and often does have a dark side.[15]

Meanwhile, Nadia de Gama and her colleagues seek to explain this ambiguous positioning which, equally, is explored in all the stories examined in this chapter. They suggest that:

> HRM as it is practiced is concerned with *distancing*, *depersonalizing*, and *dissembling*, and acts in support of the 'moral' requirements of business, not of people.[16]

By contrast, in his examination of the ethical rights and duties of HRM, Jacques Rojot maintains that it has a:

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[15] David Guest and Neil Conway, "Peering into the Black Hole: The Downside of the New Employment Relationships in the UK," *British Journal of Industrial Relations* 37, no. 098 (1999): pp. 367–389 [online] <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/229692486,Peering_into_the_Black_Hole_The_Downside_of_the_New_Employment_Relations_in_the_UK> [accessed 11/09/20128].

[16] Nadia de Gama, Steve McKenna, and Amanda Peticca-Harris, "Ethics and HRM: Theoretical and Conceptual Analysis: An Alternative Approach to Ethical HRM through the Discourse and Lived Experiences of HR Professionals," *Journal of Business Ethics* 111, no. 1, Ethics and Human Resource Management (HRM) (November 2012), Springer: pp. 97–108, 145 [online] <https://www.jstor.org/publisher/springer?refreqid=excelsior%> [accessed 20/10/2017].

> pouvoir exorbitant du droit commun
>
> [an exorbitant power in common law].

that is, it has authority to exercise extensive power over the resources for which it is responsible – unlike other business functions, such as marketing or finance, which, respectively, can punish neither recalcitrant consumers nor stockbrokers.[17]

Ultimately, the challenge for HR managers seems intractable. A single manager who 'revolts' may find it easier to resign than try to influence an entire executive team whose members, if pushed, might argue that they are only complying with the logic of the market and the edicts of shareholders. That is to say, they were 'only obeying orders' – an argument that once again reminds us of the totalitarian approach to forced labour developed by the Nazis.[18] Furthermore, shareholders in positions of oversight can easily fall back on the notion of 'plausible deniability', that is, that they are only concerned with setting priorities not how these are actually realised. In other words, they focus on ends, such as improved performance, greater labour flexibility and cost reduction, not means – the practical management-initiated actions to deliver required strategies and objectives and their impact. As Diana Winstanley concludes:

> The problem is that the prevailing common-sense ethical framework justifies HRM policy in terms of its 'utility to the organisation' or its 'consequences'. Utilitarianism, or consequentialism is, however, a very weak principle for ethical action.[19]

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[17] Jacques Rojot, Déontologie et gestion des ressources humaines, *Revue de Gestion des Ressources Humaines*, Apr–Jun 2010, p. 32 [online] <https://www.cairn.info/revue-de-gestion-des-ressources-humaines-2010-2-p-31.html> [accessed 11/09/2018].

[18] Griselda Pollock and Max Silverman, eds, *Concentrationary Imaginaries: New Encounters, Arts, Cultures, Concepts* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2015).

[19] Diana Winstanley, Jean Woodall, and Edmund Heery, "Business Ethics and Human Resource Management: Themes and Issues," *Personnel Review* 25, no. 6 (1996): pp. 5–12 [online] <https://0-search-proquest-com.wam.leeds.ac.uk/docview/214813795/fulltext/1E40CBBFBC374924PQ/1?accountid=14664> [accessed 10/10/2017].

Corporate

This story is in some ways a fictional retelling of the France Télécom case, but one which personalises the narrative by placing an HR manager, Emilie Tesson-Hansen, at its centre. *Corporate* introduces the audience to Esen, a malevolent organisation that utilises its HR function to spearhead a culture of fear, panic and suffering across its workforce via a policy of systemic violence, as defined by Žižek, that uses behavioural competencies to require each employee to be 'proactif' and 'dévoué à l'entreprise' – words and phrases that are clearly open to interpretation. These competencies are the bedrock of the organisation's philosophy of psychological violence and enable Esen to 'profile' workers and identify those whose 'contours' do not 'fit'. This process is largely subjective because it appears to be based on management opinion of a worker's personality, unsupported by evidence of actual skills or past performance. In the main, it is used by the organisation to filter out those workers with the audacity to challenge management thinking. The spectator learns that 'profiling' is an exercise distinct from performance management, so notwithstanding any excellent accomplishments, individuals can still be targeted. Such individuals are gradually squeezed out by Esen. In practice, this means that their jobs are identified as being at risk ('mise en mobilité') and then targeted workers are subsequently refused an internal transfer into an alternative role. Rather than dismiss these individuals as incapable of conforming to organisational norms (literally 'miss-fits'), Esen creates an environment in which such workers feel psychologically trapped so that once they recognise they have no room for manoeuvre, many willingly resign. Mid-level HR executives, who spectators quickly learn are ruthless and uncaring in their interactions with workers, are privy to the real purpose of this strategy and required to keep this secret, including the use of the 'la courbe du deuil', discussed earlier, whose application underpins Esen's entire approach to people management.

Esen does not see itself as either responsible or ultimately accountable for any individual suffering. This is because its senior management feels able to wash its corporate hands of any misdeeds. Such acts are delegated to, and directly carried out by, subordinates on its behalf. By placing ultimate accountability for delivery on subordinates these latter are made to feel responsible and guilty if 'complications' occur.[20]

This strategy goes awry when one finance worker, Didier Dalmat, is effectively 'placardisé.[21] He is passed over for promotion to manager, moved to a small office shared with the departmental photocopier, and has three requests for alternative work turned down by HR. He then takes his own life in a very public way, by jumping from the roof of the company's head office. He plummets, very visibly, past open-plan offices, en route to his death on the concrete below.

This action occurs at the beginning of the film and triggers the ensuing story in which Esen management, including Emilie and its head of public relations, casually seek to fabricate a story that Dalmat's suicide was caused by his separation from his wife, recently moving out of the family home and his subsequent depression. This is 'dark-side' propaganda indeed where, according to Christophe Dejours, the terrifying paradox for a suffering worker is subjective isolation, that is:

> Solitude affective au milieu de la multitude … [qui] … est probablement la première signification qu'il faut déchiffrer dans le suicide sur les lieux de travail.
>
> [Emotional loneliness among the multitude … [which] … is probably the first meaning to be deciphered in workplace suicide].[22]

In the meantime, Emilie, devoted to her job and ruthlessly efficient at doing it, gradually and reluctantly recognises her complicity in perpetrating a culture of systemic violence that she previously considered acceptable business conduct. She eventually turns on the company, to the detriment of her own career.

Corporate charts Emilie's journey as she comes to terms with her own complicity in Dalmat's death as an ethical conundrum which defines the very nature of the HR function, as enforcer of Esen's particularly malicious brand of systemic violence. The spectator sees from the outset how Emilie's ambitious, workaholic nature renders her ideal to engage in implementing the company's merciless people management practices advocated by her boss, Stéphane.

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[20] Pierre Bardelli and José Allouche, *La souffrance au travail: quelle responsabilité de l'entreprise* (Paris: Armand Colin, 2012).

[21] Lhuilier, *Placardisés* (2002).

[22] Christophe Dejours, Nouvelles formes de servitude et suicide, *Travailler*, 2005/1 (n° 13), pp. 53–73 [online] <https://www.cairn.info/revue-travailler-2005-1-page-53.htm> [accessed 15/04/2020].

Only when Emilie realises that the company is prepared to use her as a scapegoat does she recognise that she is truly on her own. When the Labour Inspector investigating the case makes it clear that, in exchange for any witness statement, she cannot provide Emilie with immunity from prosecution for any complicity in Dalmat's death, Emilie is forced to reassess and reinterpret her view of the world.[23] Appendix 1 to this study provides a sequence analysis of four key scenes in *Corporate* that demonstrate how the director of this film uses cinematography techniques to convey Emilie's psychological journey as she increasingly recognises she needs to adapt to what she has learnt about Esen's culture of systemic violence and her role in it. To echo Sartre's existential assessment of the human condition, Emilie is compelled fully to acknowledge and accept her responsibility, rather than try to conceal the truth from herself.[24]

Ressources humaines

Laurent Cantet's film provides a particularly vivid illustration of systemic violence, based on managerial arrogance and clear disregard for the interests of subordinate workers who are viewed as inferior beings by the management of a manufacturing company. The film's spectators view the world through the eyes of a young business school graduate, Franck Verdeau who secures a job in the HR department in the business where his father has worked as a shop floor operative for thirty years.

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[23] See for instance, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception* (Paris: Gallimard/NRF, 1945).

[24] Jean-Paul Sartre, *L'être et le néant* (Paris: Gallimard, 1943).

Cantet sets out the main themes of the film early on. Franck's father, Jean-Claude, is shown carrying out repetitive menial tasks, stamping out metal parts in a deafeningly loud factory environment. He appears proud of the work he carries out but, at the same time, trapped like his factory workmates in a subservient relationship with management based on perpetual surveillance, control and psychological bullying, including condescending behaviour which Jean-Claude and his colleagues appear to accept as routine.

Spectators also see the dilemma facing Jean-Claude, with Franck's return home. He loves his son and has funded his education. Now, however, he feels he has lost Franck to the middle class and a value system which he finds alien. This class divide is typified by the row that takes place between them after a restaurant meal when Franck tries to pay using a credit card – considered classic bourgeois behaviour of accruing debt – rather than paying his own way by using cash. Further, Franck now finds himself estranged from his former schoolmates who mock him for wearing a suit and take his silence as smugness. As he says:

> 'Je porte un costume, je travaille à la direction, ça vous suffit peut-être pour me voir comme un ennemi.'
>
> [I wear a suit, I work in management, perhaps that's enough for you to see me as an enemy].[25]

Yet when he tries to converse with other managers, he finds he has little in common with their views either, particularly when they talk about skiing holidays and how hard their lives are when compared to those of workers on the shop floor. Here then we see the insidious nature of systemic violence as it dictates the way the film's protagonists each see the world and so position themselves within it.

Figure 4 demonstrates how Franck undergoes an emotional journey through the course of the film that is marked by a series of events revealing the presence and scale of systemic violence in the workplace. We see that management and workers view Franck as having observably transitioned to the middle class. However, this is not how Franck sees himself. For much of the film he stands isolated on the edge of a metaphorical precipice

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[25] Cantet, *Ressources humaines* (1999), 27m.

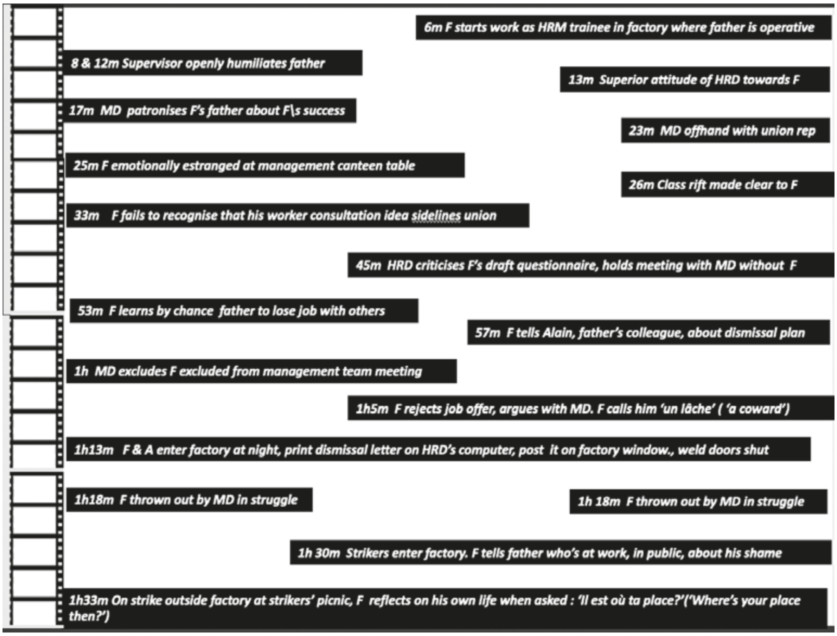
6m F starts work as HRM trainee in factory where father is operative
8 & 12m Supervisor openly humiliates father
13m Superior attitude of HRD towards F
17m MD patronises F's father about F\s success
23m MD offhand with union rep
25m F emotionally estranged at management canteen table
26m Class rift made clear to F
33m F fails to recognise that his worker consultation idea sidelines union
45m HRD criticises F's draft questionnaire, holds meeting with MD without F
53m F learns by chance father to lose job with others
57m F tells Alain, father's colleague, about dismissal plan
1h MD excludes F excluded from management team meeting
1h5m F rejects job offer, argues with MD. F calls him 'un lâche' ('a coward')
1h13m F & A enter factory at night, print dismissal letter on HRD's computer, post it on factory window., weld doors shut
1h18m F thrown out by MD in struggle
1h 18m F thrown out by MD in struggle
1h 30m Strikers enter factory. F tells father who's at work, in public, about his shame
1h33m On strike outside factory at strikers' picnic, F reflects on his own life when asked : 'Il est où ta place?'('Where's your place then?')

Figure 4. Key events in Franck's emotional journey in the face of systemic violence in *Ressources humaines*

and does not know which way to fall – rejected by working class family and friends and uncomfortable about being assigned to the organisation's management cadre which ultimately shuts him out of discussions about its plan to cut jobs.

These events also reflect how the psychological contract between Franck and his employer becomes increasingly bankrupt of valued content and finally collapses completely once every shred of trust between the main protagonist and senior management has been stripped away.[26]

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[26] Denise Rousseau, "Psychological and Implied Contracts in Organizations," *Employee Responsibilities and Rights Journal* 2 (1989): pp. 121–139 [online] <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/254187880_Psychological_contract_violation_beyond_an_employees'_perspective_The_perspective_of_employers> [accessed 07/11/2019].

There are parallels here with another film, *Violence des échanges en milieu tempéré*, analysed in Chapter 3, where Philippe, an inexperienced management consultant, fresh from business school, becomes enmeshed in a culture of systemic violence but here gradually resolves to submit to it because of the material comforts it provides.[27] By contrast, in *Ressources humaine*s, Franck decides to lead a crusade against the company, which takes the form of data theft, vandalism and ultimately leads to a factory shut down and blockade.

This story is set in a real factory where many of the workers play themselves. There is therefore a genuine sense of its distinctness as a social space (i.e. its 'champ' in Bourdieu's terms). This space features throughout the film, and particularly towards the end where, silent and devoid of workers, it appears soulless.

Franck sense of isolation is exacerbated when he rubs up against both the HR director and the main union representative who take entrenched positions. The HR director is scathing when he discovers that Franck has not followed hierarchical reporting lines by speaking initially to the factory's MD, rather than himself, about management's plan to consult with all staff directly on proposals to introduce a thirty-five-hour week and annualised hours.[28] Franck believes that management should initially consult with workers' representatives and that the management position is, as is apparent, a deliberate attempt to sideline unions.

In line with neoliberalism's dedication to numbers, the HR director stresses that the outputs from the questionnaire survey that Franck is designing for workers to complete must be measurable otherwise they will have no use as a management tool. Then Franck finds himself unexpectedly clashing with Mme Arnoux, the vociferously strident CGT union representative, who sees all management action as part of an eternal class war. Arnoux is played more as a caricature than a three-dimensional protagonist, but she clearly serves the film-maker's purpose of providing implacable opposition to a management team that, as the spectator soon realises, is not what it seems.

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[27] Jean-Marc Moutout, *Violence des échanges en milieu tempéré* (Melmedias, 2003).

[28] Act no. 98-461 of 13/06/1998 d'orientation et d'incitation relative à la réduction du temps de travail, Journal Officiel n°136 du 14/06/1998 page 9029 [online] <https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichTexte.do?cidTexte=JORFTEXT000000558109&categorieLien=id> [accessed 07/11/2019].

At the emotional nadir of the film, Franck feels completely ostracised by all around him. Then, in a key scene, he gains access to the HR director's desktop computer and discovers that the project he has been working on is a subterfuge – a cover for a management plan to dismiss a dozen workers, including his father, and replace them with new technology. In the face of such duplicity Franck decides definitively where his loyalties reside and tells Alain, one of his father's shop floor colleagues, about the planned dismissals. When the news spreads Franck becomes a major player in the industrial disruption that ensues, including breaking into the factory at night, stealing a copy of the dismissal letter and posting it on the inside of one of the factory's glass front doors so the letter can be read from outside. Then, Alain seals the doors shut with welding equipment.

In the final scene we see Franck facing an unknown future, his sense of morality intact and a deep hole in his relationship with his father, a simple man who wants nothing more than to continue working until retirement, do woodwork in his garage at the weekend and play with his grandchildren whenever he can. Franck's final words are in the form of an existential question that lingers in the spectators' ears:

> 'Et toi, elle est où ta place?'
>
> [And you, where's your place then ?][29]

This is addressed to Alain, but he knows it applies equally to himself. In the final analysis, it may apply to the film's spectators too.

Au pays des

In sharp contrast to the naturalistic style of both these films, Sylvain Levey's play *Au pays des* is an allegorical black comedy in which François, a bullied manager, who works at an entertainment theme park, unexpectedly finds himself a psychologically terrorised outsider who decides that his only means of escape is to shoot himself dead because of the vicious machinations of a distant and merciless 'conseil d'administration'. Its self-serving executives meticulously implement a process of systemic violence that underpins the organisation's entire approach to people management.[30] The form of systemic violence experienced here is only different from that witnessed in *Corporate* and *Ressources humaines* to the extent that management is quite open about the way it operates and does not seek to conceal its stratagems to subjugate and manipulate its workforce. This is psychological bullying writ large where the fates of targeted workers are understood and accepted as inevitable by the workforce.

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[29] Cantet, *Ressources humaines*, 1h36m.

The theme park provides the *habitus* for a thought-provoking enquiry into the ruthless private visage of a public-facing organisation that hides its true nature to its customers who consider it benign. This is partly because the organisation has ordered all workers perpetually to smile and simulate happiness whenever they interact with the park's many visitors. On the other hand, the organisation seeks to control worker behaviour at all times.

The name *Au pays des* playfully reflects the French title of Lewis Carroll's children classic, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* – *Alice au pays des merveilles* – and, as with *Alice*, many of the 'wonders' here are deeply cruel, unsentimental and display signs of systemic violence. So, instead of *Wonderland's* tyrannical ruler, the Queen of Hearts, the ruling elite here is the despotic, invisible 'conseil d'administration'.[31] Throughout the drama the audience is aware that senior management's ability to control, dominate and engender fear across its workforce is primal. It is markedly ironic that while the park's workers are trapped in this sinister environment, the park itself provides its visitors with a release from the stresses of their own daily lives as they:

> … passent la barrière pour voir autre chose, pour oublier le reste, quelques heures …

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[30] Levey, *Au pay des* (2011).

[31] Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (London: MacMillan) Originally published 1865.

> [… go through to the other side of the barrier to see something else, forget the rest, just for a few hours …][32]

This inside/outside dichotomy is also reflected in the structure of the play which introduces the audience to two contrasting groups. First, we encounter the middle management caste whose members, bar François, are not given real names but are designated by signs in the Barthesian sense.[33] These represent cultural artefacts with a particular resonance for a contemporary audience, each attracting a meaning beyond the definition of the object itself. There are three managers designated in this way: 'CHAUSSURES CROCO' [CROCODILE SHOES], 'BLACKBERRYWOMAN' and 'CRAVATE DE SOIE' [SILK TIE]. From a Marxist perspective, Levey has therefore given these characters names of commodities indicative of the possessions they might each value.[34] If we consider these characters as a distinct group, a notion reinforced by the glib, snappy manner in which they all express themselves, the audience is presented with a set of interlocking signs that provides a clear management type. Meanwhile, François, as the main target of their bullying campaign, becomes a pawn in an odious organisational game of systemic violence realised by colleagues whose callous behaviour illustrates a penchant for both individual psychological bullying (i.e. symbolic violence) and acceptance of physical (i.e. subjective) violence in the way François is permitted to suffer. He is at first uncomprehending then gradually feels panic and fear as he witnesses himself 'mise au placard'.[35] For instance, when his management colleagues arrange for him to be deprived of his computer, he tries to make light of it but his suffering shows through:

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[32] Levey, *Au pays* (2011), scene 6, p. 42.

[33] Roland Barthes, *L'aventure sémiologique* (Paris: Seuil, 1991).

[34] Karl Marx, *Capital – Vol. 1* (London: Everyman, 1962).

[35] Dominique Lhuilier, *Placardisés* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2002).

FRANÇOIS	J'adore ça les blagues moi.[Me, I love jokes]
CRAVATE DE SOIE	Ce n'était pas une blague … [It wasn't a joke …]
FRANÇOIS	J'ai vomi dans ma voiture ce midi-là. [That lunchtime, I threw up in the car]
BLACKBERRYWOMAN	À peine avalé il a vomi son sandwich au poulet que sa femme lui avait préparé la veille au soir. [He'd hardly swallowed it down when he threw up his chicken sandwich his wife had prepared for him the night before]
FRANÇOIS	Et j'ai pleuré.[And I cried]
CHAUSSURES CROCO	Il a pleuré.[He cried][36]

We also meet the underclass employed on the public side of the 'barrière'. These are the theme park's front-line costumed workers who, when not entertaining visitors, physically and metaphorically remove their masks to chat with one another with as much openness as the corporate culture allows. Once they don their masks, the required smile appears because, according to company lore, even when their faces are hidden, it is always possible to tell when one of these fabled characters like the 'NAINS' ['DWARVES'] and the 'PETITS CANARDS' ['DUCKLINGS'] are unhappy.[37] Moreover, the culture of the organisation is so dehumanised and sodden in fear that workers are forced to see the misfortunes of their colleagues as an opportunity for ridicule, even when a worker suffers an epileptic fit.[38] Neither can workers anticipate any respect from management or their peers. They are also under constant pressure from budgetary cuts. Today, for instance, there is only one dwarf who must do the work of the other six, and so:

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[36] Levey, *Au pays* (2011) scene 9, p. 57.
[37] Levey, *Au pays* (2011) scene 4, p. 27.
[38] Levey, *Au pays* (2011) scene 9, p. 60.

> … je cours partout et tout le temps pour faire croire que je suis plus nombreux.
>
> […I run around endlessly to make it look like there's more than just me.][39]

Workers also worry that one of their colleagues will take their own life in the theme park itself. They are openly encouraged to view suicides as heinous and selfish acts that generate a negative public image for the theme park and reduce visitor numbers and profits. The formal organisational line is that if they are intent on killing themselves, workers should end their lives in some isolated place, like the bottom of their own garden or even in the desert.

The script, with its predominance of short lines and interrupted speech, creates a hectic and rhythmic collision of scraps of dialogue, as each character manages with difficulty to interject a few words to a discussion, sometimes because they need to defend themselves. This necessity exists because it is clear that no-one is safe from victimisation. Bullying of employees and effectively targeting them to self-destruct is a fundamental part of this culture of systemic violence:

CRAVATE DE SOIE	Un jour peut-être … ce sera votre tour.[Maybe, one day … it'll be your turn.]
CHAUSSURES CROCO	Mon tour de quoi ? [My turn for what ?]
BLACKBERRYWOMAN	Un jour de dire adieu au team. [One day when you say goodbye to the team.][40]

This extract and the one in the epigraph to this chapter provide distinct examples of power and dominance in use of language. They both demonstrate plainly that these middle managers live continually in fear of each other as well as their own bosses. There is no sense of solidarity. Everyone is 'permutable' [interchangeable].[41]

Initially François fails to realise that his colleagues are mocking him when he shows initiative by coming up with an idea to make the daily parade

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39 Levey, *Au pays* (2011) scene 12, p. 76.
40 Levey, *Au pays* (2011) scene 9, p. 59.
41 Levey, *Au pays* (2011) scene 7, p. 45.

more exciting. He seems pleased until he accepts that no-one cares about his idea and that the all-powerful 'conseil d'administration' has ordained that he is to be the next target for removal. Beyond a passing reference to organisation restructuring, at no time is it made clear to François or to the audience why he, specifically, has been selected.[42]

Heartlessness as a process is so entrenched in the organisation that it has been codified into a clear sequence of steps. These include deliberate exclusion from meetings, dominating the target in discussions, isolating them, deleting their email address from the IT system, removal of their office chair, reallocation of their computer to another manager, loss of mobile phone, loss of office space – until, rootless, the individual can only roam office corridors. Thoroughly depressed and isolated, the target is then assigned to join the unskilled, theme park workers as a costumed character. This is pure 'placardisation', where workers remain employed but are denied the opportunity for suitable work. Beleaguered managers are left with nothing but a necktie, a crude incitement to self-destruction, while new recruits – designated only as 'intérimaires' – are fully aware of their precarious status from the outset:

LA DORMEUSE (SLEEPY)	tu remplaces un mort … [you're replacing a dead person …]
LE LION	le troisième en cinq ans. [the third in five years].[43]

Finally, as management anticipates, François completes the last step in the process himself by ending his own life. On hearing of François's suicide, managers and costumed workers alike appear all to take this in their stride, as if they are blameless in the suffering that led to François's death and the subsequent family distress.

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[42] Levey, *Au pays* (2011) scene 7, p. 43.

[43] Levey, *Au pays* (2011) scene 10, p. 67.

CHAUSSURES DE CROCO Il avait dû se rater avec la première balle. [He must have missed with the first bullet.]

CRAVATE DE SOIE Chut. [Damn.][44]

This play appears to represent a society which has truly disintegrated. To echo Gorz's typology of a modern workforce, workers here have been divided into three distinct groups: the first, which includes François, whose work has been commoditised and where members are easily replaceable; the second, where workers' jobs are perennially at risk because they have only been offered short-term contracts and the third, where the remaining few are unseen semi-protected senior employees with special skills.[45]

In a recorded performance of this play on *YouTube*, as the play progresses, the director has chosen to move some of the actors through different roles so that the audience sees not just the impact of bullying on François but also how different individuals who first appear as managers are progressively demoted and replaced by others who then take over their predecessors' symbolic titles, such as 'CHAUSSURES CROCO'. So, the original actor in this management role subsequently appears as a redeployed and downgraded costumed worker. This is clearly a directorial choice because there is no guidance in the script. However, the main impact of this innovation is to heighten the idea that bullying is indeed a continuing, systemic process.[46]

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[44] Levey, *Au pays* (2011) scene 14, p. 80.

[45] André Gorz, *Métamorphoses du travail: critique de la raison économique* (Paris: Éditions Galilée, 1988), p. 151.

[46] Recorded performance of Sylvain Levey's *Au pays des* directed by Morien Nolot [online] at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sf7SNapISxY> [accessed 06/12/2017].

Boxon(s) jusqu'à n'en plus pouvoir

This recent stage play by Stéphane Jaubertie about conflict and confusion in different social contexts, including the workplace, illustrates how corporate malevolence in the form of systemic violence in a totalitarian environment can unfold by making it part of a bizarre game.[47] Here, all parties are aware of what is happening and, effectively, the internal cultural norms force them to engage in a perverse form of 'entertainment' with serious consequences.

In one brief scene we encounter six workers (three male and three female) who have been summoned into a room by an HR director to be told that three of them face dismissal because of a shareholder decision to restructure the business in order to increase return on investment. The HR director explains that senior management has found it impossible to select the three workers to be dismissed because they are all 'excellents collaborateurs'. Workers are therefore all treated as if they were identical commodities with no consideration for any distinctive skills or characteristics, including their personal circumstances. The audience learns that the organisation has decided on a novel form of self-selection for dismissal. The skills of an actor/consultant have been procured. He has a briefcase containing make-up, wigs, clown noses, tambourines and small bells to help them get into the mood. He urges them to play a farcical game of tag using a roll of toilet paper as an improvised ball. He apparently forgot to bring the real ball with him. This substitution further demeans the workers involved.

The workers feel compelled to join in the game because, should they refuse, they will be automatically dismissed. The rules of this game of chance are simple. If physically touched by another player, the worker is immediately dismissed. The only way to escape is if hit by the toilet roll when it is thrown by another worker. The toilet roll is hurled back and forth without coming into contact with anyone and, in an atmosphere of chaos, confusion and mutual abuse, the required three workers are quickly eliminated. This is a surreal and somewhat ludicrous game of hazard, in which all those involved are infantilised by their acceptance that the utterly barbaric can be normalised to satisfy the needs of organisational efficiency.

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[47] Jaubertie, *Boxon(s)* (2018).

It is open to question whether such a child-like activity is as irrational as portrayed by Jaubertie. However, in a recent article in *Le Monde diplomatique*, Maurice Midena, a journalist and former business school student, persuasively argues that management training at business schools is designed specifically to 'infantilise' generations of managers by institutionalising:

> … un mépris pour la curiosité. Les étudiants perdent progressivement leur goût du savoir pour se plier aux injonctions de la vie de l'établissement. Délestés de leur souci scolaire, ils peuvent alors s'accommoder du « sérieux » du monde de l'entreprise.
>
> [… contempt for curiosity. Students progressively lose their taste for knowledge in order to comply with the injunctions of institutional life. Relieved of their academic concerns, they can then accommodate the 'seriousness' of the business world].[48]

Arguably, this is also exactly what we have seen in the simplistic use of the 'courbe de deuil' ['mourning curve']in the France Télécom case and the fictional tale, *Corporate*.

As Jaubertie's HR director concludes, his is a pragmatic but not exactly a scientific approach to selection for dismissal:

> C'est peut-être pas la meilleure solution, mais c'est certainement la moins pire.
>
> [It may not be the best solution, but it's certainly the least worst].[49]

There is therefore a lingering question here, that is, given the extremes experienced in the world of non-fiction, with France Télécom and other organisations, is Jaubertie's savage game really that insane? It is debatable that human beings always behave logically, consistently or indeed compassionately, either in our own true interests or in the interests of others; but we do need to feel we are basing our actions on rational judgements.

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[48] Maurice Midena, Théologie du management, *Le monde diplomatitique*, 12/2019 [online] <https://www.monde-diplomatique.fr/2018/12/MIDENA/59326> [accessed 20/02/2020].

[49] Jaubertie, *Boxon(s)* (2018), pp. 77–82.

As a character in another play, *Hard copy*, to be critically analysed in Chapter 6, states:

> Même lorsqu'on joue, il faut un minimum de règles. Sans règles, on ne peut aller nulle part. C'est comme la société qui a perdu ses valeurs.
>
> [Even in a game, you need basic rules. Without rules, you can't do anything. Just think of a society that's forgotten its values.][50]

Concluding comments

This chapter has sought to use fictional representations critically to examine the practical nature of systemic violence. Each of these stories illustrates, to varying degrees, how such violence can come to the fore and fester in the neoliberal environment because it is driven directly by the need continuously to improve business performance in competitive markets, regardless of individual suffering. It is evident that much of its success or failure to take root depends on the moral integrity of senior management and passive acceptance by subjugated workers.

Each story provides different perspectives on the nature of systemic violence, from management arrogance and casual distain of workers interests, to wilful cruelty with an explicit policy to single out workers and break them psychologically. Inevitably, workers seek escape from suffering in any way possible.

These tales also reveal how storytellers deploy their craft deliberately to communicate both the horror of systemic violence and the barriers to wiping it out. Readers and spectators witness the inevitable erosion and eventual destruction of mutual trust between management and workers, while management believes its hands remain clean because, as these stories consistently affirm, systemic violence is often accompanied by a grandiose sense of self-worth and entitlement among managers who believe that they are always right. Such behaviour may be exhibited in discussion between management and workers or, as illustrated in the film, *Ressources humaines*, where a group of managers at lunch discuss their skiing holidays and assert they have to work much harder than shop floor colleagues. In any event, these interactions can clearly be seen as underpinning management's value system, that is, it supports their world view.[51]

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[50] Isabelle Sorente, *Hard copy*, revised, undated and unpublished electronic version. p. 19. All references in this book to *Hard copy*, are to this script provided to me via email by the author in Pdf format on 19/04/2008. Originally published by Arles: Actes Sud-Papiers, 2001.

In *Corporate* worker suffering from such violence is resolved by Didier Dalmat through self-destruction. Meanwhile, after much introspection, HR manager, Emilie Tesson-Hansen, figuratively sheds her professional persona of malevolence that is eloquently captured in Dalmat's tortured caricature sketches of her that Emilie discovers among the meagre personal effects left in his office space. Ultimately, she decides to disclose confidential business information about the organisation's covert and repeated practices of systemic violence, by cooperating with the legal authorities and throwing away her career. In what might be described as a risky venture, she records a conversation with her boss that is subsequently broadcast over the internet, confirming his culpability in Dalmat's demise. This is portrayed as a credible outcome but it is worth recognising that Emilie's husband is unemployed at the end of the film and, unless a profitable future awaits her as the writer of an autobiography and/or conference speaker, any business career is likely to be over.

The resolution of Franck's challenges in *Ressources humaines* seems even more problematic. This story pivots on his ability to break into the HR director's office and retrieve a file, detailing a confidential and highly sensitive plan for staff cuts, from the HR director's desktop computer. It is difficult to believe that Franck would have gained access to this file whose contents had already been denied to him by senior management. In practice, it seems plausible that the computer, if not the file itself, would have been password protected. For all its merits, this seems a weakness in the plotting of the film. In any event, Franck's criminal act leads to his instant dismissal and he obtains little satisfaction from joining his former schoolmates, all manual workers, who go on strike as a consequence of his disclosure.

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[51] Marie-Line Germain, *Narcissism at Work* (London: Palgrave, 2017), p. 5.

As already discussed, in *Au pays des*, Levey's François finds the pressures so great that he takes his own life, while in Jaubertie's play workers resign themselves to the inevitable outcome of agreeing to play the 'game' because they have no room for manoeuvre.

In summary, all these stories, as echoes of the critical literature examined in Chapter 1, suggest that workers can escape the cruelty of systemic violence, but only a very few can do so without any deeply psychological or mortal scars.

CHAPTER 3

Homo œconomicus and beyond

> Seul est 'vrai' ce qui est calculable, quantifiable, et qui s'exprime en nombres. Tout le reste n'a que d'existence que 'subjective', c'est à dire est en quelque sorte surajouté au monde par la 'subjectivité' et doit être refoulé dans les marges de la pensée. La répression de tout ce qui ne relève pas de l'intellect et calcul est censée donner accès à la 'vérité'; seul est dans la vérité l'homo œconomicus et son frère jumeau, son ombre: le travail informatisé.
>
> [Only that which is calculable, quantifiable, and expressed in numbers is 'true'. Everything else has only a 'subjective' existence, i.e. it somehow supplements the world by 'subjectivity' and has to be quashed into the margins of thought. We quash everything that does not belong to the intellect and calculation is supposed to give access to the 'truth'. It is only in homo oeconomicus and his twin brother, his shadow: computerised labour, that truth can be discovered.][1]

This study makes a distinction between two broad classifications of work. On the one hand, in the majority of jobs, work can be said to be routinised and driven by established procedures. In many such roles, the automation of numerous repetitive operations has rendered multiple process-driven manual tasks obsolete, either through mechanisation or, increasingly, use of digital technology. On the other hand, there are those jobs that require knowledge creation and innovation, that is, knowledge work – where job holders have more latitude to decide what they do, when they do it and how they approach their work. This chapter focuses primarily on this first category, that is, on the many jobs where tasks are routinised and the key requirement is to follow the rules laid down by management. It only discusses knowledge work and those who carry it out insofar as this provides context for greater understanding of routinised work and how its value to the organisation is calculated.

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[1] André Gorz, *Métamorphoses du travail: Critique de la raison économique* (Paris: Éditions Galilée, 1988), p. 142.

In particular, the chapter focusses on how organisations use technology to control work performance through a range of measurement techniques in the workplace itself and also where individuals work from home. It critiques some of the assumptions that underpin this model, including the notion that all aspects of work output can be measured objectively. Moreover, it investigates how this model may encourage psychological violence and how this phenomenon is articulated through the psychological suffering of workers. Specific issues relating to the employment and lived experiences of knowledge workers are dealt with subsequently in Chapter 4.

Finally, this chapter seeks critically to examine how storytelling represents the argument, put forward in much of the critical literature, that to maximise organisational efficiency, neoliberalism treats those employed on routinised work, not as rounded social beings but, as far as possible, as standard operating units defined using scientific principles in terms of measurable inputs, outputs and resulting contribution. In other words, it investigates how contemporary workplace methods and practices undermine subjectivity by emphasising compliance, standardisation and quantifiable results.

Measurement, control and compliance

The philosopher, Valérie Charolles, argues that the advent of the neoliberal work environment in the 1980s constituted a major shift in the world of work in which:

> La culture du chiffre et de la performance s'est affirmée dans tous les compartiments de l'existence …
>
> [The cuture of numbers and performance has taken hold in all areas of existence …]

because it brought measurement of all jobs to the forefront as a way of evaluating their contribution, along with a philosophy of continuous performance improvement.[2] Vincent de Gaulejac maintains that this deeply rooted 'obsession des résultats chiffrés' compels contemporary organisations to concentrate exclusively on the '*homo œconomicus*' whose every behaviour is considered rational and quantifiable and can be predicted in the pursuit of achieving organisational objectives.[3] As he puts it:

> l'imaginaire social est dominé par la logique capitaliste qui canalise les fantasmes, les désirs, les aspirations, mais aussi la 'pulsion épistémologique' …
>
> [the social imagination is dominated by the logic of capitalism that channels fantasies, desires, aspirations, but also the 'epistemological drive' …][4]

There appear, however, to be at least four plausible difficulties with this approach. First, there is no genuine basis for standardisation of performance. For instance, Yves Clot and Michel Gollac, respectively a psychologist and a sociologist, note that ergonomics (the study of individuals in their workplace to improve effectiveness) focuses on an *imaginary* 'average' worker because there is no such person as a standard one, only individuals with differing physical attributes. As they note:

> Les travailleurs réels ne sont pas le travailleur 'moyen'. Il n'ont pas la taille intermédiaire, certains sont grands, d'autres petits … Le travailleur établit un compromis entre les exigences de la tâche et la préservation de sa santé à l'aide de ses propres ressources et de celles de son environnement (technique, organisationnel, social …). Si les ressources sont insuffisantes pour élaborer un compromis satisfaisant, il y a risque. La variété des individus est au cœur de cette problématique: les ressources des uns ne sont pas celles des autres …
>
> [Real workers aren't 'average'. They establish a balance between the demands of the task and the maintenance of health using their own resources and those within the environment (technical, organisational, social, etc.). If the resources are inadequate

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[2] Valérie Charolles, Les faits et les chiffres: Sur la mesure de la performance. *Le Débat* 2016/5 n° 192 | pp. 94–106 [online] <https://www.cairn.info/revue-le-debat-2016-5-page-94.htm> [accessed 05/12/2019].

[3] Vincent de Gaulejac, *La société malade de la gestion* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2005) (Second edition, 2009), Preface, p. 9.

[4] de Gaulejac, *op.cit.*, 2009, p. 79 <https://www.bizjournals.com/cincinnati/news/2015/08/10/p-g-reveals-latest-workforce-reductions.html> [accessed 31/10/2018].

> to achieve a satisfactory balance, there is a risk. The diverse nature of individuals is at the heart of this problem: the resources of some are not those of others …].[5]

This may explain why, as some of the stories analysed in this study illustrate (notably the novels, *Retour aux mots sauvages* and *Des clous*), call-centre workers, among others, who are required to use ill-fitting, standard telephone headsets, can suffer musculo-skeletal problems as well as psychological distress when carrying out their tasks.[6][7][8]

Secondly, neoliberalism's 'culture du chiffre' ['culture of numbers'] operates by sweeping up genuinely measureable outputs and combining these with variables that are not truly quantifiable in order to define what is ultimately a subjective notion of 'peak' performance that translates these variables into stock output measures. This is done by segmenting jobs into distinct tasks to be completed in a particular order, each with a calculable output. For instance, in a service environment, such as a department store where selling is the main activity, performance metrics are likely to include the precise number of customers and items sold as well as qualitative factors, such as an estimate of 'customer satisfaction' based on feedback from customers. Such calculations are likely to incorporate standard descriptors and points scales.[9] As Ngobo notes, there might also be scales covering such subjective characteristics as perceived personal credibility of sales assistants and the extent to which customers' initial expectations were actually met in practice.[10]

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[5] Yves Clot and Michel Gollac, *Le travail, peut-il devenir supportable?* (Paris: Armand Colin, Second edition, 2017), p. 15.

[6] J. C. Grosjean and M. Neboit, *Ergonomie et prévention en conception des situations de travail*, Note documentaire INRS, 2000 [online] <http://www.inrs.fr/media.html?refINRS=ND%202127> [accessed 30/04/2020].

[7] Thierry Beinstingel, *Retour aux mots sauvages* (Paris: Fayard/ Le livre de poche, 2010).

[8] Tatiana Arfel, *Des clous* (Paris: José Corti, 2010).

[9] François Meyssonnier and Mehdi Zakar. *Satisfaction du client et efficience du personnel en contact dans la relation de service: Étude du cas d'une entreprise de grandes surfaces de bricolage*. 2015. hal- 01238523 [online] <https://hal.archives-ouvertes.fr/hal-01238523/document> [accessed 24/04/2020].

[10] Paul Valentin Ngobo, Les standards de comparaison et la gestion de la satisfaction des clients Author(s): Décisions Marketing, No. 13 (Janv.–Avr. 1998), pp. 57–66

Conceivably, the use of such scales and associated qualitative descriptions of different performance levels has been encouraged by the growing importance of the second broad category of work mentioned earlier, that is, knowledge work. Under neoliberalism, mental prowess, the fundamental characteristic of knowledge work, may be viewed as the key differentiating factor in achieving sustained organisational success. According to many critics, this attribute has become more important in today's commercial context than physical capability.[11] This may explain why such scales and descriptors, expressed as 'competencies', are now often used to define, quantify and rate individual performance in such 'soft' areas as 'creativity' and 'innovation'.[12] It seems probable that the aim of this and other techniques is for management to seek complete control over their workers' psychological pressure points, regardless of the nature of their work.[13]

Sociologist, Danièle Linhart, asserts that today, by seeking to control how individuals work through their allocated tasks, often mediated by digital technology, the end result is identical to that achieved previously under industrial capitalism with its direct physical managerial surveillance and rigid standard times for completing tasks, using scientific management principles.[14] That is, the processes for carrying out specific tasks and the way they are controlled are different, but the impact is the same. Linhart

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[online] <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40592618> [accessed 28/04/2020]. See also : Sylvain Chassée, *10 indicateurs essentiels pour mesurer la satisfaction des clients + modèle de questionnaire* [undated] [online] <https://www.sylvainchasse.com/mesure-satisfaction-client-questionnaire/> [accessed 01/05/2020].

[11] Yann Moulier Boutang, *Cognitive Capitalism*, trans. Ed Emery (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2011). See also: Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (New York: Penguin Books, 2004).

[12] Ksenia Zheltoukhova and Ally Weeks, "Competence and Competency Frameworks," *CIPD Research*, 29/09/2017 [online] .<https://www.cipd.co.uk/knowledge/fundamentals/people/performance/competency-factsheet> [accessed 22/01/2019].

[13] Jeremy Lane and Sarah Waters, "Work in Crisis: Film, Fiction and Theory," *Modern & Contemporary France* 26, no. 3: pp. 225–232 [online] <https://doi.org/10.1080/09639489.2018.1448769> [accessed 15/01/2019].

[14] Frederick Winslow Taylor, *The Principles of Scientific Management* (New York/London: Harper and Brothers, 1919).

therefore concludes that yesterday's 'déshumanisation' has been replaced by today's 'sur-humanisation' of work which is, paradoxically, also dehumanising – so that in both instances, workers are conceivably encouraged to yield to managerial coercive control.[15]

Jerry Muller synthesises this entire argument when he explains:

> Il y a des choses qui peuvent être mesurées. Il y a des choses qui valent d'être mesurées. Mais ce que nous pouvons mesurer n'est pas toujours ce qui vaut d'être mesuré ; ce qui est mesuré peut n'avoir aucune relation avec ce que nous voulons vraiment savoir. Le coût de la mesure peut-être plus fort que ses bénéfices. Les choses que nous mesurons peuvent nous éloigner des choses dont nous voulons vraiment prendre soin. Et la mesure nous apporte souvent une connaissance altérée – une connaissance qui semble solide, mais demeure plutôt décevante.
>
> [There are things that can be measured. There are things that are worth measuring. But what we can measure is not always what is worth measuring; what is measured may have no relation to what we really want to know. The cost of measurement may be greater than the benefit. The things we measure may divert us from the things we really want to care about. And measurement often brings us modified knowledge – knowledge that seems solid, but remains rather disappointing.][16]

So, not only is this type of measurement applied as if all its elements were objective and quantifiable, when they are not, any incongruence may create psychological tensions for individual workers to perform to a standard that is non-existent and may actually be physically unachievable, or even meaningless given that there will always be factors that impact performance in the working environment that are outside the worker's control, such as power cuts, sudden changes in the weather or sickness.

Muller's argument reveals another challenge with this economic model, that is, by imposing a straitjacket based solely on the economic measurement of workers' performance, organisations ignore those aspects of an individual's contribution that genuinely make a difference to the business

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[15] Danièle Linhart, *La comédie humaine du travail* (Toulouse: Éirès, 2017), pp. 141–144.

[16] Jerry Z. Muller, *La tyrannie des métriques* (Geneva: Éditions Markus Haller, 2020) quoted in Hubert Guillaud, De la tyrannie des chiffres, *lemonde.fr*, 29/09/2018 [online] <https://www.lemonde.fr/blog/internetactu/2018/09/29/de-la-tyrannie-des-chiffres/> [accessed 06/12/2019].

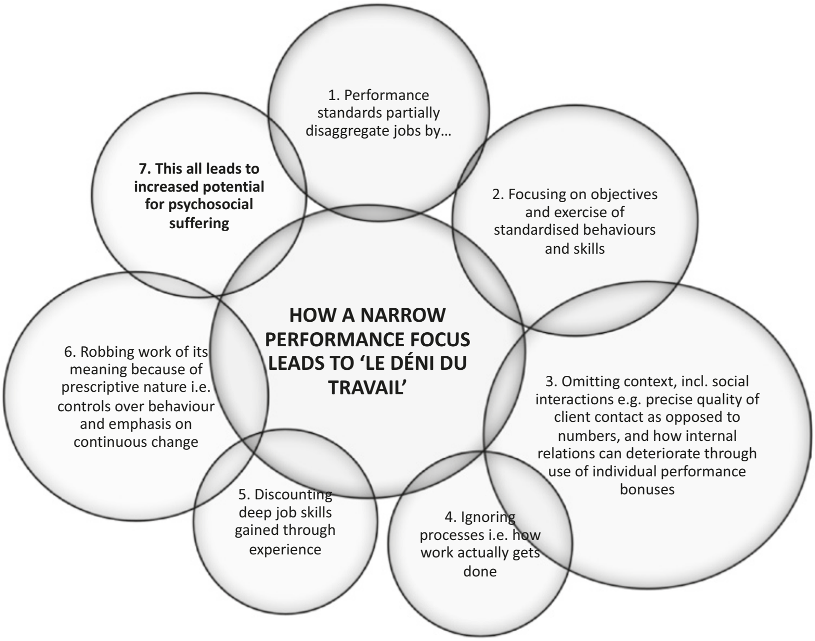
1. Performance standards partially disaggregate jobs by…
2. Focusing on objectives and exercise of standardised behaviours and skills
3. Omitting context, incl. social interactions e.g. precise quality of client contact as opposed to numbers, and how internal relations can deteriorate through use of individual performance bonuses
4. Ignoring processes i.e. how work actually gets done
5. Discounting deep job skills gained through experience
6. Robbing work of its meaning because of prescriptive nature i.e. controls over behaviour and emphasis on continuous change
7. This all leads to increased potential for psychosocial suffering
HOW A NARROW PERFORMANCE FOCUS LEADS TO 'LE DÉNI DU TRAVAIL'

Figure 5. Collard's 'Déni du travail' argument in a nutshell

environment and may also give meaning to the individual for the work they are required to carry out. This view is supported by Damien Collard's conclusions in a recent study that examines the neoliberal organisation's single-minded focus on controlling and quantifying all aspects of work within a narrow economic model that ignores its social context, discounts human potential, robs work of its meaning and engenders psychosocial suffering.[17] Collard's core argument – what he labels a 'denial of work' – is encapsulated in Figure 5.

Collard's work provides a direct line of sight between neoliberal people practices and the psychological suffering of workers. It is supported by detailed research. This includes an analysis of the organisational changes faced by front office staff at the French national railway company, SNCF, in 1999, where the introduction of measurable service standards ('normes de service') and client/provider relationships were imposed as business priorities on inner-city-rail station staff, who had earlier been deliberately recruited from young, local, socially deprived groups able to tackle many of the spontaneous and explosive situations involving socially marginalised individuals who had made urban rail stations their homes, or at least their daytime resting and social spaces. Such skills were substantially ignored under the new arrangements which focussed exclusively on rewarding workers for delivering business focussed quantifiable outputs. Thus, the organisation stifled workers' capabilities to address important contextual social issues, while they focussed instead on repainting walls, repairing stairs and installing flower arrangements – all measurable activities aimed at directly and visibly improving the passenger experience. This situation created tensions between management and workers and considerable psychological stress because station workers were no longer encouraged to exercise what had previously been considered their core skills, while the challenges of social exclusion now simply surfaced and were ignored by SNCF.

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[17] Damien Collard, *Le travail, au-delà de l'évaluation: Normes et résistances* (Toulouse: Éirès, 2018), pp. 20–40.

This 'denial of work' created by the application of standardised management control systems and processes is equally evident in the fiction of Beinstingel, Arfel and El Kaïm. This fiction, as demonstrated earlier, repeatedly represents situations where the organisational fetters of uniformity disallow workers their individuality, limit their capability and lead them to be bullied and to suffer psychologically because they are simply not allowed to draw on the full range of their individual capabilities.

The final difficulty here is that individuals do not always react in a way that may be considered, from a universal perspective, as 'rational'. As César Hildago notes, within a workplace context where individuals make a bargain to supply labour in return for income, they do not always seek to maximise personal economic gain as the prevailing neoliberal philosophy dictates.[18] For instance, they may reduce their performance when they tacitly or explicity recognise they have enough income to sustain themselves economically, or they reach a level of mental and/or physical exertion where they simply cannot continue, or perhaps they begin to resent the economic bargain they have made and consider it an inequitable one. There are, it seems, many reasons for not being quite rational.

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[18] César A. Hidalgo, "Not Quite Rational Man: A New Paradigm in Economics Recognizes the Complexity in Human Behavior," *City Journal* (Spring 2017) [online] <https://www.city-journal.org/contributor/césar-hidalgo_1207A> [accessed 05/05/2020].

These reflections do not mean that the underlying economic theory has no value, but they do alert us to the fact that the theory that sits behind the notion of 'economic man' is incomplete and that, as all the stories analysed here amply demonstrate, its abridged model of human behaviour contributes to the practice of workplace psychological violence.[19]

It is also important to note that the notion of *homo oeconomicus* may extend geographically beyond work premises when use of digital technology for occupational purposes spreads into the home. This can negatively impact both how such work is carried out as well as availability and access to leisure time. So, while the organisation continues to focus exclusively on the economic outputs of individual workers and the added value they create, workers are compelled to accommodate the never-ending tension and/ or competition for their time and attention between their work and their personal and family responsibilities. As Kolsi Mohamed and Jamoussi Dorra put it:

> … un individu ne vit et ne travaille pas dans le vide, mais bien dans un contexte sociologique et économique plus large, son 'bien-être' physique et psychologique est étroitement lié à une coordination satisfaisante entre son travail et sa vie privée.
>
> [… individuals neither live nor work in a vacuum, but in a wider sociological and economic context, their physical and psychological 'well-being' is closely linked to achieving satisfactory balance between work and private life].[20]

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[19] Bernard Guerrien and Emmanuelle Benicourt, *La théorie économique néoclassique* (Paris : La Découverte, 2008, Third edition).

[20] Kolsi Mohamed Jamoussi Dorra , la conciliation entre vie privée et vie professionnelle et son impact sur l'engagement au travail, *Memoire online, ressources humaines* [online] <https://www.memoireonline.com/04/08/1039/m_conciliation-vie-privee-vie-professionnelle-engagement-travail0.html> [accessed 06/08/2019].

These pressures are supported by research evidence suggesting that workers' activities at home are sometimes controlled by the existence, or mere belief in the presence of, covert workplace digital applications on home computers, that can invisibly record their identity, tasks carried out and the length of time needed to complete them. This sitiuation may therefore constitute another form of psychological violence. According to a 1989 UK survey, covering almost 2,000 workers and reported in France, this type of behaviour may have intensified as the result of the recent Coronavirus lockdown which has required more people than customary to work from home where possible.[21] This and more recent research provides evidence of video-surveillance, monitoring of emails, social network use and message content, as well as GPS tracking of workers via mobile phones.[22]

Conceivably, there are strong parallels here with Michel Foucault's analysis of Jeremy Bentham's architectural model of the eighteenth-century prison, the 'panopticon', where it was always possible to be seen by overseers, while prisoners felt obliged to control their own actions even though they might not, momentarily, have been under the direct gaze of the prison authorities.[23] It also echoes academic thinker and Holocaust survivor,

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[21] Patrick Ruiz, Des employés en télétravail photographiés toutes les 5 minutes par des patrons désireux de juger de leur productivité - Via un service vidéo en continu, en expansion rapide avec le coronavirus, 24/03/2020, *Developpez.com* [online] <https://emploi.developpez.com/actu/297985/Des-employes-en-teletravail-photographies-toutes-les-5-minutes-par-des-patrons-desireux-de-juger-de-leur-productivite-via-un-service-video-en-continu-en-expansion-rapide-avec-le-coronavirus/> [accessed 27/04/2020].

[22] Benoît Berthelot , Wifi, Imprimante, badge: comment votre employeur vous suit à la trace, Capital avec management, 08/03/2019, *Capital.fr* [online] <https://www.capital.fr/votre-carriere/wi-fi-imprimante-badge-comment-votre-employeur-vous-suit-a-la-trace-1330657> [accessed 27/04/2020]. See also: Roger Clarke, "Risks Inherent in the Digital Surveillance Economy: A Research Agenda," *Journal of Information Technology* (04/03/2019) [online] <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0268396218815559> [accessed 30/04/2020].

[23] Michel Foucault, *Surveiller et punir: Naissance de la prison* (Paris: Gallimard, 1993). See also: The Panopticon, *The Bentham Project*, University College, London [online] <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/bentham-project/who-was-jeremy-bentham/panopticon> [accessed 06/08/2019].

Zygmunt Bauman's, view that this approach constitutes a form of social indoctrination, that is, psychological violence where:

> The ultimate aim of observation and correction is to produce disciplined initiates who do not require correction – men and women who will behave as if they are always under surveillance even when they are not.[24]

In his short essay, *Post-scriptum sur les sociétés de contrôle*, Gilles Deleuze examines Foucault's work on closed 'sociétés disciplinaires', including this historical prison regime, and contrasts these with today's neoliberal 'sociétés de contrôle'.[25] Deleuze argues that, not only do the latter divide workers by using every means at their disposal to promote 'une rivalité inexpiable', including use of individual merit pay, but the culture of measurement and control is inevitably linked to the value of money on international currency markets:

> Le langage numérique du contrôle est fait de chiffres, qui marquent l'accès à l'information, ou le rejet … le contrôle renvoie à des échanges flottants, modulations qui font intervenir comme chiffre un pourcentage de différentes monnaies échantillons.
>
> [The digital language of control comprises numbers, which provides access to information, or their rejection … control refers to floating currency exchanges, variations that use a percentage of different sample currencies as a number.]

How mental suffering expresses itself

The primarily psychological nature of workplace violence under neoliberalism means that such aggression may go unseen by third parties and include repeated messages that are expressly malevolent in tone or may be construed as such. They are all likely negatively to impact workers and promote a sense of worthlessness, isolation and powerlessness. As undercover journalist, Florence Aubenas, suggests in her memoir about night work, employment may sometimes be equivalent to making a bargain where money is exchanged in return for loss of self-dignity. For instance, Aubenas is told by a new employer that she will have to work five hours a week but only be paid for three. When she queries the reason, she is instructed patronisingly:

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[24] Dennis Smith, *Bauman* (1999), pp. 138–139.

[25] Gilles Deleuze, Post-scriptum sur les sociétés de contrôle, *L'autre journal*, 1 (May 1990), <http://aejcpp.free.fr/articles/controle_deleuze.htm> [accessed 14/03/2018].

> 'Madame Aubenas, je pouvais passer toute la matinée à vous expliquer, mais ça n'en vaut pas la peine. Je ne suis pas sûr que vous soyez capable de comprendre.'
>
> [Mrs Aubenas, I could spend all morning explaining this to you, but it's not worth it. I'm not sure you'd be able to understand.][26]

French psychologist Christophe Dejours has explored how being alienated from work through such pressures is mentally destructive for the individual and subjectively isolating. However, he maintains, this suffering may not be as severe as the fear of actual unemployment:

> … de surcroît, il s'avère que, même aliéné, le travail est souvent moins délétère que la privation de travail. Et si l'on pousse plus loin encore la contradiction, on trouvera aussi des situations où le travail, même dominé, apparaît comme un moyen d'accomplissement de soi, voire comme un médiateur de l'émancipation.
>
> [… moreover, it seems that, even when alienating, work is often less harmful than no work. And if we push the contradiction even further, we will also find situations where work, even when being subjugated, appears to be a means of self-fulfilment, or even a mediator of emancipation].[27]

Arguably, psychic conflict is inevitable in all human interactions, as we seek to define who we are and what we want to achieve in any given situation. As individuals, we may hope for the best, expect the worst, convince ourselves we will accept whatever happens or simply opt out – in the case of a worker, by resigning, deliberately letting their performance level fall so they are dismissed, or *in extremis*, taking their own life. Again, the paradox is that while neoliberalism purports to provide a template for human behaviour that is comprehensive, as individuals we may recognise through our responses to different work situations that the commercial model is incomplete and this generates psychological suffering. As philosopher and sociologist, Edgar Morin, puts it:

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[26] Florence Aubenas, *Le quai de Ouistreham* (Paris: Éditions de l'Olivier, 2010), p. 176.

[27] Christophe Dejours, Aliénation et clinique du travail, *Actuel Marx* . 2006/1 (n° 39) [online] <https://www.cairn.info/revue-actuel-marx-2006-1.htm> [accessed 27/04/2020].

> L'homme ne peut être réduit à son visage technicien *d'homo faber*, ni à son visage rationalistique *d'homo sapiens*. Il faut dans le visage de l'homme considérer le mythe, la fête, la danse, le chant, l'extase, l'amour, la mort, la démesure, la guerre … Il ne faut pas rejeter comme 'bruit', résidu, dechet, l'affectivité, la névrose, le désordre, l'aléa … seule l'élaboration d'une théorie de l'hypercomplexité organisationelle permettrait d'intègrer de façon coherente les aspects incohérents des phénoménes humains, seule elle pourrait rationellement concevoir l'irrationalité …
>
> [Humanity cannot be reduced to its technical face of a [homo faber] mere maker, nor to its rationalistic face of [homo sapiens] a wise person. When engaging with humanity, we must consider myth, celebration, dance, song, ecstasy, love, death, excess, war … We must not reject this as 'noise', residue, waste, affectivity, neurosis, disorder … only by devising a theory of organisational hypercomplexity would it be possible to integrate the incoherent aspects of human phenomena in a coherent way, only this would be rationally capable of conceiving irrationality …].[28]

As the stories critically analysed in this chapter illustrate, workers often try to resist psychological pressures to control their actions, thoughts and even their use of language. However, this struggle, between the economic need to conform and obey and an innate human desire for independent thought, self-expression and social interaction, can lead to much psychosocial suffering.[29]

It is also worth noting that stress and depression here can be aggravated by the precarious nature of many jobs, because workers with common skill sets can easily be substituted or replaced permanently by organisations. They are especially vulnerable where market demand for particular skills changes or there are 'advances' in technology that render repetitive manual tasks obsolete.[30] Furthermore, as André Gorz argues, investment in technology does not necessarily ease pressure on workers.[31]

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[28] Edgar Morin, *Le paradigme perdu: la nature humaine* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1979), pp. 218–219.

[29] de Gaulejac, *La Société malade de la gestion* (2005), pp. 79–83.

There are two novels critically analysed here – Thierry Beinstingel's *Retour aux mots sauvages* and Tatiana Arfel's *Des clous*, along with the stage play, Frédéric El Kaïm's *Les nouveaux barbares*.[32] All these stories focus on coercive control of workers by organisations and encompass organisational policies that include systemic violence as described in Chapter 2. Beinstingel's novel provides a powerful example of how organisational policies and processes can transform workers into servile, machine-like creatures, able only to provide programmed responses derived from a standard script. At the same time, this story focuses on one worker's struggle to retain his individuality, including his connections with others. On the other hand, Arfel's novel analyses the psychosocial impact of a duplicitous strategy by an organisation to terminate the employment of workers singled out by a narcissistic chief executive as 'non-conformes', that is, unable and/or unwilling to meet the purely economic performance standards he has set. Meanwhile, El Kaïm's play offers an illustration from the standpoint of an anguished worker, Alexandre Lenoir, dismissed because his level of productivity falls as he mourns the death of his only child. According to this play's calculating and callous HR director, speaking, it seems, without an iota of irony or self-awareness:

> Notre premier souci a été de penser à Monsieur Lenoir.
>
> [Our primary consideration has been to think of Mr. Lenoir.][33]

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[30] Valentine Hélardot, Précarisation du travail et de l'emploi: quelles résonances dans la construction des expériences sociales?, *Empan*, 2005/4 (nº 60), p. 30–37. [online] <https://www.cairn.info/revue-empan-2005-4-page-30.htm> [accessed 21/11/2019].

[31] Gorz, *Métamorphoses* (1988), p. 147.

[32] My analysis of El Kaïm's play is based on the unpublished script of the play and access to a limited access video recording of a performance at the Centre Culturel La Caravelle Marcheprime, Bordeaux on 28/11/2014. Both were provided to me by the author. At time of writing this recording is available at <https://vimeo.com/117086308le> (password: LNB) [accessed 06/03/2018 and subsequently].

[33] Frédéric El Kaïm, *Les nouveaux barbares* (unpublished, 2014) s.3.

It is notable that both Arfel's and El Kaïm's stories incorporate a deep seam of dark humour as a counterpart, as it were, to the organisational messaging with its sinister undertones imbedded within these stories. Such mood changes appear entirely consistent with the way individuals sometimes seek to alleviate suffering by making jokes, because we feel uncomfortable about challenging circumstances, especially those involving the discomfort of others. Humour is therefore used here as a form of emotional release.

These stories examine both the nature of monitoring and control under neoliberalism and its wider social impacts. In particular, while workplace bullying, expressed for instance, through digital monitoring and other forms of control, such as mocking or snubbing, deliberately isolates workers from their colleagues, it also has the potential to subjectively distance workers from their families.[34] Such suffering may not be immediately evident but its impact may well increase over time during which period visible symptoms alter. According to a three-year study of 200 hospital patients by Marie Grenier-Pezé and Marie-Christine Soula, respectively, a psychologist and a senior labour inspector, short-term symptoms include chronic exhaustion and fatigue, decreased self-esteem, and feelings of guilt and shame that can lead to depression. On the other hand, in the longer term, these feelings are likely to transform into severe depression, paranoia, psychosomatic disorganisation, addictive behaviour and suicidal tendencies up to and including suicide itself.[35] Given that bullying targets also tend to conceal work pressures from their partners and children – through shame and the desire to shield others – it is understandable that there may be a delay before observed changes in behaviour can be fully understood beyond the workplace.

For the sociologist Vincent de Gaulejac, shame is essentially an undisclosed emotion where:

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[34] Christophe Dejours, *La souffrance en France: la banalisation de l'injustice sociale* (Paris: Seuil, 2000), p. 225.

[35] Marie Grenier-Pezé and Marie-Christine Soula, Approche multidisciplinaire du harcèlement moral, *Document pour le Médecin du Travail*, études et enquêtes, No. 90, 2002, pp. 137–145.

> l'intériorisation et l'inhibition … enferment le sujet dans l'impasse.
>
> [internalising and inhibition shut off the subject in a dead end].[36]

He argues that our reaction to being challenged for allegedly shameful behaviour is usually self-rationalisation and defensiveness. For de Gaulejac, this includes his own early experience of psychoanalysis that delved into his pre-revolutionary heritage as a descendant of an aristocratic family.[37] He claims that individuals are inherently unwilling to discuss directly personal experiences of shame, including workplace bullying:

> La honte, c'est le désamour de soi, c'est penser qu'on est mauvais à l'intérieur.
>
> [Shame is self-loathing. It's thinking you're bad inside.][38]

While guilt and shame are clearly not the same, they are inextricably intertwined. US social psychologists Taya Cohen and her colleagues have recently developed questionnaire-based processes for determining the propensity for individuals to feel guilt and shame using their *Guilt and Shame Proneness Scale (GASP)* which they claim:

> has the potential to be an important measurement tool for detecting individuals susceptible to corruption and unethical behaviour.[39]

The danger, of course, is that, where systemic violence has been normalised, organisations might use the results of such analysis, in practice, to encourage recruitment of bullies!

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36 Vincent de Gaulejac, *Les sources de la honte* (Bruges: Desclée de Brouwer, 2008, Second edition), p. 13.

37 de Gaulejac, *Les sources* (2008), p. 16.

38 de Gaulejac, *op.cit.*, 2008, p. 59.

39 Taya R. Cohen et al., "Introducing the GASP Scale: A New Measure of Guilt and Shame Proneness," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 100, no. 5 (2011): pp. 947–966 [online] <http://psycnet.apa.org/doiLanding?doi=10.1037%2Fa0022641> [accessed 16/01/2018].

A 2012 study, based on a questionnaire survey of 1,500 French workers, with over eighty in-depth follow-up interviews, provides another route into understanding this issue. It was led by Jean-Claude Delgenes and Anne Barthelemy, respectively an economist and a psycho-sociologist. It concluded that:

> La majorité des salariés vivent un déchirement entre l'importance qu'ils accordent à leur travail et celle qu'ils peinent à donner à leur vie privée, familiale principalement.
>
> [Most workers are torn between the importance they give to their work and the importance they struggle to give to their private lives.][40]

This study also examined how work and home lives interact in complex ways:

> Choisir ou non son emploi, avoir un ou plusieurs enfants, habiter plus ou moins loin de son lieu de travail, être marié ou divorcé, travailler de nuit ou se déplacer fréquemment, voici quelques-unes des variables qui permettent de ressentir fortement ou atténuer les interactions positives ou négatives entre la vie professionnelle et la vie privée.
>
> [Choosing or not choosing a job, having one or more children, living nearer or further from your workplace, being married or divorced, working nights or travelling lots, these are some of the factors that make positive or negative work-life interactions strongly felt or made bearable.][41]

Once workers have children, work–life balance becomes more difficult. Paradoxically, however, according to survey responses, as family size grows, female workers, in particular, find their organisational and coping skills increase, and they are better able to handle the challenges of enlarged family size.

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[40] Jean-Claude Delgenes and Anne Barthelemy, *Les effets du travail sur la vie privée*, / UMC mars 2012, p. 3 [online] <http://docplayer.fr/78493492-Les-effets-du-travail-sur-la-vie-privee.html> [accessed 06/08/2019].

[41] Delgenes and Barthelemey, *Les effets* (2012), p. 4.

Retour aux mots sauvages

Thierry Beinstingel's novel focusses on a very contemporary work environment – the call centre – where continuing electronic surveillance and immediate performance feedback dominate all aspects of worker behaviour. Call centres are a significant part of France's contemporary economy and their operating methods provide a focal point, not just for this story, but also Marin Ledun's novel, *Les visages écrasés,* and its film adaptation, *Carole Matthieu*, both critically analysed in Chapter 5.[42]

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[42] According to one French commercial study, there are currently around 3,500 call centres in France with some 264,000 workers, representing almost 1 per cent of France's working population. The same study reveals an average labour turnover across these centres of 25 per cent. *Téléprospection*, Les centres d'appel français, 2008. [online] <http://www.frederic-chartier.com/teleprospection/index.php?Centres-d-appels> [accessed 27/07/2018].

This contrasts with average labour turnover for the whole French economy of 16.8 per cent (2015). *DARES Indicateurs*, Le taux de rotation de La main-d'œuvre poursuit sa hausse au 1er trimestre 2015, juillet 2015. N° 054 [online] <http://dares.travail-emploi.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/2015-054-2.pdf> [accessed 02/08/2018].

Academic research provides an insight into the reasons for this relatively high level of labour turnover. An Australian academic study of four call centres concluded that high levels of labour turnover are encouraged so that, by deploying what the authors dub a 'sacrificial HR strategy', call-centre management could secure both high levels of cost efficiency and customer service simultaneously. This balance of seemingly mutually exclusive objectives was achieved by: 'the deliberate, frequent replacement of employees in order to provide enthusiastic, motivated customer service at low cost to the organization', Catriona M. Wallace, Geoff Eagleson, and Robert Walderse, "The Sacrificial HR Strategy," *International Journal of Service Industry Management* 11, no, 2 (2000): pp. 174–185 [online] <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/228858584_The_Sacrificial_HR_Strategy_in_Call_Centres?enrichId=rgreq-2f6d6bea26cdac3715e51175f6a2279a-XXX&enrichSource=Y292ZXJQYWdlOzIyODg1ODU4NDtBUzozNjU1NzE3MTI1MzY1NzhAMTQ2NDE3MDQ5Njg5Mg%3D%3D&el=1_x_2&_esc=publicationCoverPdf> [accessed 22/07/2018].

This strategy therefore quickly and deliberately drains employee 'assets' of their value by driving high levels of productivity through intense direct managerial pressure, including constant digital measurement of individual performance and

In a 2011 questionnaire survey of around forty workplace occupational physicians (specialist 'médecins du travail'), INRS, France's institute for research and safety in the prevention of occupational accidents and diseases, provided some crucial insights into the sources of pressures on call handlers. It identified several organisational factors that make call-centre work inherently challenging. These included: simultaneous use of equipment such as headsets, microphones and screens needed to perform 'plusieurs fonctions cognitives et sensorielles'; pressure from number of calls; required use of scripts; need for flexible, unsocial working hours; multiple control systems, including routine listening in on calls by supervisors; and stressful conversations with callers who sometimes exhibit aggressive behaviours.[43]

From a psychological and clinical psychiatric perspective, Christophe Dejours and Isabelle Gernet point out that the harmful effects of working under intense continuing pressure have long been known. They note that In the 1950s, research was undertaken on telephone operators' tasks that foreshadows that of today's call-centre workers. These operators, working under constant direct supervision, were continually required to connect callers quickly to the appropriate organisational department. They complained of sleeplessness, trembling, nausea, digestive problems, loss of memory and concentration, as well as difficulties in reading and following conversations. These authors view such suffering as the consequence of a particular lived experience:

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feedback. Together these promote, if not guarantee, 'burnout', i.e. physical and mental exhaustion, which both Beinstingel and Ledun reflect on in their novels.

Call handlers in this Australian study were required to deal with up to 200 calls a day, some 30 per cent of which involved customer complaints – another source of stress for these workers. Such management conduct constitutes a culture of systemic violence and contributes to explaining employee suicides among call-centre staff in France.

[43] Dominique Chouanière and Stéphanie Boini, Conditions de travail et santé dans les centres d'appels téléphoniques, *Documents pour le médecin du travail*, 126/2, 06/2011, INRS, pp. 241–259 [online] <http://www.inrs.fr/media.html?refINRS=TF%20191> [accessed 06/12/2019].

> résultant de la confrontation dynamique des sujets à l'organisation du travail.
>
> [resulting in a dynamic confrontation between workers and work organisation].[44]

They maintain that this reaction is an automatic response to an experience of suffering that subsequently cannot be recalled in its totality by the individual's consciousness. This outcome stems entirely from a subjective emotional reaction to a concrete experience at work. It is therefore unlike 'anxiety' with its extensive history of treatment in clinical psychology and through psychoanalysis.[45]

Beinstingel's story clearly illustrates how continuous surveillance of worker performance, in a vast impersonal working environment, can undermine and even destroy individuals psychologically, affecting them both within and outside work. Dominance over workers is achieved not just by harnessing technology to control and measure physical activity, but also via mandatory use of scripts which minimise opportunities for genuine conversations with callers and colleagues. In addition, work processes infantilise workers and customers:

> Quand le client est au bout du fil, t'as qu'à penser que t'expliques quelque chose à tes gosses, ça viendra tout seul.
>
> [When a customer's on the line, just imagine you're explaining something to your kids, it'll come by itself.][46]

All these techniques, when combined, regulate thought and speech, influencing behaviour at work and beyond. However, as this story illustrates and de Gaulejac and Hanique assert, increasingly intense workplace mental pressures that limit individual autonomy can lead to stress, burnout, depression, psychological bullying and suicide. They argue we have entered an era where order and chaos exist concurrently and feed off one another, that is:

> Les sociétés hypermodernes valorisent la raison, la rationalité, la science, la mesure objective, tout en générant un état de crise permanente.

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[44] Christophe Dejours and Isabelle Gernet, *Psychopathologie du travail* (Issy-les-Moulineaux: Elsevier Masson, Second edition, 2016), p. 7.

[45] Dejours and Gernet, *Psychopathologie* (2016), p. 18.

[46] Beinstingel, *Retour* (2010), p. 15.

> [Hypermodern societies value reason, rationality, science, objective measurement, while they engender a state of permanent crisis.][47]

All these techniques may be coupled with other control mechanisms that combine with psychological violence, and so deliberately keep workers in a state of anxiety and financially insecure. This includes limiting their promotion potential and only offering fixed-term contracts.

Beinstingel's main protagonist, a former skilled engineer made redundant, is relieved when he finds a job as a call handler selling telephone subscription contracts. However, he soon realises that to succeed in this new role he must put aside former work habits. In particular, he strives to find ways to reduce the physical effects of constantly needing to talk throughout the day; and the psychological pressures arising from the requirement persistently to comply with rigid performance standards on the number of calls taken and successful sales conversions per hour. At the same time, his performance against target is continually fed back to him 'in real time' on his own desktop computer screen.[48] These metrics ignore the full range of reasons customers contact call centres. In practice, research shows that some callers are not looking for a speedy commercial outcome from a call, especially where they are socially isolated and are simply seeking company. In such instances, when technology connects a customer to an already pressured call handler, this is unlikely to ease the stress for either party.[49]

Beinstingel's protagonist is prohibited from using his own name with customers and colleagues although, contrary to earlier practice, 'Éric' is permitted to choose his own nickname, rather than this selection being, as it once was, within management's gift. This change in practice is seen by management as a liberal response to union demands, although, in actuality, it costs the organisation nothing.[50]

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[47] Vincent de Gaulejac and Fabienne Hanique, *Le capitalisme paradoxant. Un système qui rend fou* (Paris: Seuil, 2015), p. 29.

[48] Beinstingel, *Retour* (2010), p. 95.

[49] Pour les personnes âgées isolées, des hotlines existent, 24/01/2017, *silverco.fr* [online] <https://www.silvereco.fr/pour-les-personnes-agees-isolees-des-hotlines-existent/3173264> [accessed 06/12/2019].

[50] Beinstingel, *Retour* (2010), p. 20.

In the meantime, during the summer heat, there is a wave of suicides across other call centres within the same group of companies which increasingly impacts 'Éric' and his immediate colleagues who at first, only tentatively, question what organisational working practices and the physical working environment are doing to their own mental and physical health. These suicides play out in the background of the novel and are initially disbelieved by 'Éric' and his colleagues. Yet, as these tragedies multiply and gain wide media publicity, 'Éric' and his immediate workmates have to acknowledge their existence and seriously question why the suicides have occurred.

Beinstingel weaves into his narrative the struggle of his main protagonist to remain an individual, a social animal, who can communicate freely and in meaningful ways with others by deploying 'les mots sauvages' – the primitive words of the title, as opposed to the dumbed down, scripted 'novlangue managériale' of business.

The activities and physical environment of the call centre are dehumanising in various ways. As well as continuous control and surveillance, each worker is embedded as part of a team of four at a circular table with minimal space for personal belongings, on a vast open-plan floor alongside numerous other identically organised teams. Call handlers are required to sell telephone subscription packages with meaningless names, such as 'Optimum comfort'. They must average 12–15 calls an hour, and never say 'bonjour' to callers, only 'au revoir' – a pattern that soon reflects itself in 'Éric's' life outside work. In fact, every aspect of the working environment:

> est prévu à l'avance, réfléchi, raisonné, jugé, examiné, conçu, médité, considéré, envisagé, gambergé, ruminé.
>
> [has been planned in advance, reflected on, reasoned, judged, examined, conceived, meditated, considered, contemplated, pondered, ruminated on].[51]

Clearly there are strong parallels here with the psychological torment of workers in a number of non-fictional organisations. In fact, Beinstingel is a former France Télécom HR manager and by selecting an older worker from a skilled background as his novel's main protagonist, he reflects the fact that, at France Télécom, suicides largely affected older workers who had been redeployed from skilled jobs to work in call centres. Suicides at France Télécom did not affect newly recruited younger workers.[52]

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[51] Beinstingel, *Retour* (2010), p. 26.

When describing the work of the call handler, the author often uses an abbreviated depersonalised style which propels the narrative forward, as in its opening sentence:

> Retour au travail, course pour être à l'heure: il arrive un matin dans le service.
>
> [Returning to work, racing to be on time: he arrives one morning in the department][53]

This narrative style reflects and punctuates the nature of the work with its incessant pressure and pace, both outside the control of the call handlers.

Further, Beinstingel creates a distancing effect between the main protagonist and the reader. He does this by using the third-person authorial voice and never revealing 'Éric's' true name. The overall impact of these stylistic decisions is to focus the reader's attention not just on the challenges facing 'Éric', but on the general suffering of all workers operating in this inherently brutal environment. Beinstingel's intention to create a dystopian world is therefore clear. Moreover, by quoting Proust's description of nineteenth century call operators as benign 'anges gardiens' [guardian angels] in the novel's epigraph, the reader is compelled to reflect that new technological inventions, in Proust's case the telephone, may not invariably benefit workers in the long term.[54]

Early in the novel 'Éric' is advised by a call handler approaching retirement that to survive in the job you must recognise the physical strain on your throat from having to speak continually all day. You also need mentally to disconnect yourself from the repetitive boredom of the work:

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52 Sarah Waters, "Suicide Voices: Testimonies of Trauma in the French Workplace," *Medical Humanities* 43, no. 1 (2017): pp. 24–29 [online] <http://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/106146/3/WatersSuicide%20Voices.pdf> [accessed 08/11/2018].

53 Beinstingel, *Retour* (2010), p. 9.

54 Marcel Proust, *À la recherche du temps perdu III: Le Côté de Guermantes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1921), p. 160 [online] <https://ebooks-bnr.com/ebooks/pdf4/proust_a_la_recherche_du_temps_perdu_3_cote_guermantes.pdf> [accessed 20/07/2018].

> Parler, parler au client, le noyer sous tes mots … Ce que le client te raconte, n'y prête jamais attention … Si tu comprends tu es sauvé, tu peux penser à autre chose pendant que tu parles. Ton esprit vogue ailleurs.
>
> [Talk, talk to the customer, drown them in your words … What the customer tells you, never pay any attention to it … If you understand you are saved, you can think of something else while you talk. Your mind wanders elsewhere.][55]

As 'Éric' grows accustomed to his new role, his coarsened hands, skilfully used for decades to strip wire and manipulate screws, screwdrivers and drills, undergo a physical transformation as they become softer and only used to move and click a computer mouse.[56] In the meantime, manipulative software, 'la bidouille logicielle', circumscribes all his actions and deprives him of the need to possess any skill beyond repetition of scripted words. This combination of intense psychological pressures and extremely limited discretion of individual decision-making can lead to what US psychologist Robert Karesek has called 'job strain', a succinct phrase now adopted into French business.[57]

The need to talk all day tires 'Éric' out and he becomes taciturn and distant when he returns home to his wife.[58] He finds it hard to sleep, his throat swells and he has a buzzing in his ears which he imagines to be the echoes of indecipherable telephone conversations in his head.[59]

Then, a third of the way through the novel, an incident occurs that triggers a major change in 'Éric's' world view as it enables him to demonstrate to himself that he can still rescue his individual identity from his robotic work existence. As Jean-Claude Kaufman puts it:

> La construction sociale de la réalité passe par les filtres identitaires individuelles.
>
> [The social construction of reality passes through individual identity filters.][60]

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[55] Beinstingel, *Retour* (2010), pp. 13–14.

[56] Beinstingel, *Retour* (2010), p. 53.

[57] Robert A. Karasek, *Healthy Work: Stress, Productivity, and the Reconstruction of Working Life* (New York: Basic Books, 1990). See also: Chouanière and Boini, *Conditions de travail* (2011), p. 242.

[58] Beinstingel, *Retour* (2010), p. 52.

[59] Beinstingel, *Retour* (2010), pp. 21–23.

[60] Jean-Claude Kaufman, *L'invention de soi une théorie de l'identité* (Paris: Éditions Fayard, 2017), p. 291.

This incident involves a call from a bizarre-sounding customer with a rasping metallic voice who claims that, although he has paid his landline telephone bill – literally a lifeline as the reader learns – the telecommunications company claims it has no record of payment and plans to cut him off.[61] Although direct contact with clients is frowned upon by the organisation, 'Éric' uses his time between shifts to visit the caller's apartment where he learns the customer lives with his sister. The brother is bed-ridden and paralysed after an accident and yet appears fully adjusted to his circumstances. 'Éric' swiftly resolves the billing issue, strikes up a friendship with them both and carries out electrical repairs and decorating for them. He questions himself, especially when challenged by his wife about his absences as to why these people are so important to him. He comes closest to answering this question when he tries to explain to his aged mother that, if a paraplegic with a voice box can adjust to suffering and be happy, so can he.[62]

Then, at his wife's prompting, 'Éric' discovers a further way to regain a broader perspective on life by taking up running after a break of many years.[63] During these periods alone and then in competition with other runners, as he passes through countryside and jogs along urban canal towpaths, he rediscovers a sense of inner peace. He learns that physical exertion can be mentally liberating and the fresh insights he gains help him cope with the impact of the continuing worker suicides and the repeated criticism he receives from irate, frustrated customers, such as:

> Vous ne pouvez pas parler normalement ? Me demander simplement pourquoi je vous téléphone au lieu de me sortir vos phrases toutes faites ?
>
> [Can't you talk normally? Just ask me why I'm phoning you instead of giving me your off-the-peg sentences ?] [64]

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[61] Beinstingel, *Retour* (2010), Chap. 20 onwards.
[62] Beinstingel, *Retour* (2010), pp. 149–151.
[63] Beinstingel, *Retour* (2010), p. 60.
[64] Beinstingel, *Retour* (2010), p. 105.

As the novel draws to a close and the organisation proves itself only capable of making cosmetic changes to its ways of working, 'Éric' tells the brother and sister his real name – which the reader never learns – and tries to explain his personal struggle to regain his individuality. At the same time, their parents give him a present of a platter engraved with the name 'Éric'. The brother, who was originally shocked by the revelation that this name is a mere sobriquet, concludes sympathetically that:

> pour nous vous êtes Éric.
>
> [for us, you're just Eric].[65]

The novel concludes with 'Éric' running competitively for the pure joy of doing so, even though he will probably be among the last to complete the race, he feels physically and spiritually liberated, able to smile and to talk freely using his own words. He may not have completely reconciled the competing demands of the organisation with his own humanity, but he has found a way to compartmentalise this conflict and enrich his life beyond the walls of the call centre.

Retour aux mots sauvages is one of several novels written by Beinstingel about the world at work.[66]

Des clous

This novel provides a detailed case study of how an obsessive, narcissistic senior executive, who is both company founder and CEO, seeks psychologically to coerce and dominate a group of workers using a range of metrics and absurdist techniques because their performance does not conform to the standards he has set out. The novel represents a scathing attack on the physical, mental and social suffering imposed by a US-style neoliberal business rife with systemic violence. Author, Tatiana Arfel, takes some of these practices to the extreme to reveal their ludicrous nature, including overt attempts at mind control through use of electronic impulses and an extreme example of the reductive nature of management terminology. In so doing, she presents a portrait of an organisation and its fanatical CEO, which is, at times, both repugnant and laughable – although, worryingly, not beyond the realms of the probable.

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[65] Beinstingel, *Retour* (2010), p. 219.

[66] See, for instance, Beinstingel's novels, *Central* (Paris: Fayard, 2000) and *Ils désertent* (Paris: Fayard, 2012).

The novel focuses on the organisation, Human Tools (HT), and how, over a decade, Frédéric Hautfort, has built it into a highly profitable organisation specialising in developing and selling control and measurement software applications that cover a comprehensive range of business processes which go far beyond pure accounting to include behaviour change through 'gestion des employés non-conformes' ['management of non-compliant workers'].[67] HT is therefore presented as the very essence of a neoliberal organisation because it exists not only to impose order through measurement and control internally but, through the sales of its own products and services, to spread this gospel globally across other organisations.

With the exception of its brief introduction – an extract from a sales brochure – extolling the virtues of this fictional company, Tatiana Arfel's novel is largely set out as a series of monologues from different individuals, some with dates attached so that the reader can track their chronology. This novel, unlike Beinstingel's story, does not focus on a single individual, rather it deals with a group of protagonists, deliberately pushed beyond their physical and mental limits in order to improve their performance.

Des clous also shares some of the attributes of stage drama in which the spectator directly engages with the characters' thoughts. In a play, this effect would be achieved through soliloquy to the audience; in the novel stream of consciousness narrative is employed. In some cases, this 'vue intérieure', as Arfel labels it, is supplemented by a 'vue extérieure' so that the reader obtains a detailed understanding of both the protagonists' and antagonists' genuine motivations as expressed in their unfiltered thoughts, as well as their spoken words, which sometimes only clumsily mask their real motivations. For instance, Hautfort speaks to the delegates he has carefully singled out to attend a series of mandated 'séminaires de remotivation' *[remotivation seminars]* and tells them that their work will benefit from participating in this programme.[68] Later, however, he reveals in his thoughts to the reader that these seminars are designed only to encourage each delegate to conclude that they have no alternative but to resign or be dismissed:

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[67] Arfel, *Des clous* (2010), p. 8.

> Que fait-on quand un membre est malade ? Quand il a la gangrène ? Eh bien on ampute, avant contamination de tout l'organisme.
>
> [What do you do when a limb turns bad ? When it's got gangrene ? You amputate before it infects the rest of the body.][69]

This technique of revealing to the reader both what an individual says and what they are actually thinking is unique to stories of the imagination, as it is unlikely to be achieved in non-fiction. In this particular instance, it also illustrates with absolute clarity how far Hautfort is prepared to go to satisfy his desire to control and dominate workers to ensure they 'conform' to his notions of effective performance and undermine each of their mental states.

For Hautfort, therefore, the training programme, which provides the backbone of the novel, is simply an artifice, underpinned by 'dark' communications, to obtain 'evidence' for poor performance. He recognises that to dismiss these workers now, without such alleged proof from the completed training programme, would be in contravention of French employment law. This programme is targeted at six individuals, selected by Hautfort to take part because they have consistently failed to meet the rigid performance standards based solely on economic criteria that he has set. Each seminar is overtly designed to ensure full individual compliance in action and thought, so that HT's economic returns are maximised. However, Hautfort believes they will, and indeed must, all fail because he considers each participant as a trivial encumbrance to be disposed of summarily:

> J'aime le proverbe: 'Clou qui dépasse souvent rencontre marteau'.
>
> [I love the proverb : 'The nail that sticks out often encounters the hammer.'][70]

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[68] Arfel, *Des clous* (2010), pp. 26–28.
[69] Arfel, *Des clous* (2010), p. 44.
[70] Arfel, *Des clous* (2010), p. 92.

The novel raises significant questions about the nature and use of performance standards especially because there is clearly a gap between those that are measurable, those that are not, such as leadership and creativity, and those that may be said to add commercial value.[71]

This analysis focuses on two of the six 'non-conformes' so as to demonstrate in detail how HT seeks to implement its subjugation strategy and the struggles individuals have to resist it. The reader first meets them both just before they join HT when they believe, mistakenly, that their new job opportunities will meet their personal, social and economic needs. However, these initial hopes dissipate over time. Despite the dispiriting and invidious coercive controls over their workplace activities, including growing use of US-inspired business terminology as the main means of communication, both these workers, Sonia Ben Lahawi, a call handler, and the former HR director, Catherine Lahore, who is effectively the novel's main protagonist, continue to struggle to fit in. Despite all the bullying they have experienced, they initially feel, paradoxically, highly indebted to HT for providing them with a 'secure' job on open-ended contracts and they clearly want to perform well. However, HT is not interested in its workers as social beings, but only as economic units. Moreover, Arfel ensures the reader understands each individual's current hopes and future aspirations for themselves and their families, and not just how they see themselves within a work context.

Sonia is a young French-born woman of Algerian descent, a single mother whose two small children are taught the Koran by her father while her mother bakes cakes and Sonia goes out to work at HT. Sonia gained her job at HT following a recruitment day for multi-lingual call handlers, including rigorous psychological and aptitude tests which directly pitted job candidates against one another. She recognises that her attitude towards these selection pressures drew on some baser instincts she would have normally suppressed, but which the HT brought to the fore:

> Je trouvais ça dur mais je n'ai rien dit, que dire, ceux qui attendent à la porte je pouvais sentir leur souffle sur mon cou, leurs mains s'avancer sur moi, prêts à prendre ma place, à prendre les futures vacances des petits. Alors, j'ai regardé par terre comme

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[71] Charolles, *Les faits*. (2016), p. 96.

> tout le monde quand une candidate a pleuré … mais quand elle est passée près de moi j'ai tourné la tête …
>
> [I thought it was hard but said nothing. What could I say to those waiting at the door? I could feel them breathing down my neck, their hands coming up to me, ready to take my place, to deprive the kids of their future holidays. So I looked down like everyone else when a candidate cried … but when she passed by me I turned my head …].[72]

Not unreasonably, Sonia's main rationale for working is to enable her children to eat well, go to the cinema and take good summer holidays. However, four years into the job we learn that the security and future Sonia dreamt of has been marred by harsh working conditions that are causing musculo-skeletal disorders. While she types on a computer keyboard, she is required to spend each day seated with her neck twisted to secure the headset jammed between the side of her face and shoulder. As a result, she finds she must habitually swallow ten anti-inflammatories a day. However, these no longer keep the pain at bay. Further, despite all her efforts, including sending repeated internal emails that bounce back because the addresses have been disconnected, she has failed to track down the person responsible for issuing proper headgear and who could enable her to do her job without continuously contorting her body. She now has chronic pain between her shoulders and in her neck. Meanwhile, her children ask why she always stoops. She cannot afford HT's recommended physiotherapist and is not allowed to use the more substantial telephonist headset she bought with her own money because it is not HT approved. As a consequence, she is always tired; while at night, she tosses and turns in bed, dreams of taking calls and wakes in a sweat, fearing that she has wrongly inputted information on her computer screen. This records all key performance indicators that are reviewed routinely by two people. She is so stressed that at home she answers her telephone as if she were at work and finds it impossible to hold complete conversations. HT has also refused to allow her to take time off during the school holidays because this is when the business predicts it will be particularly busy answering customer queries.[73]

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[72] Arfel, *Des clous* (2010), p. 19.

[73] Arfel, *Des clous* (2010), pp. 33–35.

Sonia recognises that, despite all her efforts, she is on the 'remotivation' programme because of her propensity meticulously to apply all the detailed aspects of the mandatory script governing how call handlers must speak to HT clients. This very precision has led her repeatedly to extend calls beyond their allotted standard time so that her overall performance is consistently regarded as poor. She is also faced with the uncomfortable fact that she is helping to sell HT control systems to neo-colonialist businesses in developing countries, including Algeria, that are used to control and coerce local workers – probably including her relatives. This makes her feel deeply ashamed. However, she feels she has no energy to look for another job:

> Et surtout pas en linguistique [parce que] je ne crois plus aux mots depuis longtemps, les mots sont vides, manipulateurs, de petits marionnettes agitées par HT … Parce que mes enfants mangent à leurs faim, parce que c'est confortable …
>
> [And especially not in linguistics [because] I haven't believed in words for ages, words are empty, manipulative, little puppets waved around by HT … Because my children eat their fill, because it's comfortable …].[74]

The issue of linguistic skills comes to the fore when new HR director, Sabine, offers to allow Sonia time off to take her children to the cinema in return for Sonia's participating in a pompously named 'Commission spéciale d'élaboration de protocoles de vocabulaires purifié'. The other participants include Hautfort, Sabine and HT's finance director, Mr Wright, an American who talks about the advantages of employing US business terminology, a distinct form of language which offers only binary options because it is:

> Simplifiée, forte, réductible à l'infini, et supportait très bien les abréviations de toutes sortes du moment qu'elle produit un impact maximum …
>
> [Simplified, strong, infinitely reducable, and supports all types of abbreviations so long as it produces maximum impact …].

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[74] Arfel, *Des clous* (2010), p. 74.

Sonia recognises the parallels this language has with Orwell's creation of 'newspeak' in the novel *1984*.[75] She acknowledges that this process is quite simply another way of securing total compliance from a workforce because it represents:

> la soumission des personnes par la langue …
>
> [submission of people by language …].[76]

During these meetings, attendees develop a checklist of excluded and permissible words and expressions, generating, in Sonia's words, a language that is both 'vide and froide' ['empty and cold'] being devoid of emotional content.[77] Sonia becomes engrossed by this new language which alters her thought processes, not just the spoken word.[78] She grows increasingly inarticulate as well as confused and desperate to hang on to the job for fear her children will go hungry and are no longer able to go to the cinema.[79]

On the other hand, Catherine Lahore was recruited by HT at age 46. She had had a successful career and is happily married with two grown-up children. When offered the job as human resources director, she felt ready for a new challenge and joined what was then a business start-up. She saw herself as someone who communicated well with others and addressed challenges by being pragmatic, rather than applying doctrinaire solutions. In this respect, she measured her success by how she had helped people throughout her career, including the fact that she still received holiday postcards from some of her former colleagues. She believed that team working and protecting the weak were key attributes of the HR function.[80]

However, six years on, during HT's first 'remotivation' session, and in a prescription-drug-induced daze, Catherine reflects on the crippling personal psychological effects of working as an enforcer in an environment which is callous, dehumanising and where:

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[75] George Orwell, *1984* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1949).

[76] Arfel, *Des clous* (2010), p. 147.

[77] Arfel, *Des clous* (2010), p. 149.

[78] Arfel, *Des clous* (2010), p. 206.

[79] Arfel, *Des clous* (2010), p. 219.

[80] Arfel, *Des clous* (2010), p. 11–13.

> Frédéric derrière moi me poussait, tu n’as pas le choix, il faut prendre le train en marche, la modernité ça s’appelle …
>
> [Frédéric was shoving me from behind, you’ve no choice, you have to jump on the bandwagon, modernity is calling …][81]

Catherine has been selected for this programme because she refused to follow Hautfort’s orders deliberately to ‘destabilise’ the other five delegates by implementing a series of edicts, including changing their office locations, making deliberate errors in their pay slips, refusing annual leave requests and wilfully depriving them of work so that they felt no option but to resign. Hautfort then applies some of these tactics directly to Catherine herself.

This constant pressure has led Catherine into a serious psychological decline. Unable to relax at home, she has been prescribed anti-depressants on which she now depends. She has had a mental breakdown and been forced to take three-months’ sick leave. In the meantime, her job in HR has been taken by Sabine, one of Hautfort’s key acolytes who tells the programme delegates, in line with Hautfort’s views of the world, that they must each see themselves as computers in need of reprogramming.[82] Catherine now feels thoroughly jaded and powerless.

However, as time passes, Catherine finds she can think more clearly and, because all her work has been re-allocated to Sabine, she begins to write, at work and later at home as a kind of therapy. In her writing she reflects on how HT’s people policies can best be altered to help workers, rather than crush them psychologically and physically. In particular, she is critical of the current working environment where the open-plan design of all offices denies individuals any opportunity for the slightest degree of privacy. Catherine believes that this structure, designed by Hautfort, is responsible for extremely low worker moral and contributes to high labour turnover because people have no place ‘to let off steam’. This situation has therefore substantially increased the financial costs of recruitment.[83] Catherine believes that these challenges can be remedied with structural changes, including the provision of spaces where workers can occasionally relax in comfort in side rooms to talk to each other in relative confidence, so that their every glance or utterance, which may be construed as negative towards management, can no longer be spied on and reported back up the hierarchy. Catherine also wants workers' contributions to be routinely recognised by management with a simple 'thank you', either via email or face-to-face. Currently, such overt approval is considered countercultural.

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[81] Arfel, *Des clous* (2010), p. 67.

[82] Arfel, *Des clous* (2010), pp. 37–38.

[83] Arfel, *Des clous* (2010), p. 153.

Catherine is determined to help her five colleagues and eventually enlists the support of Denis, the trainer brought in by HT to give the 'remotivation' programme a veneer of independent objectivity.[84] He had originally viewed recruitment for this programme as an opportunity for long-term employment at HT. Subsequently, however, he changes his mind when he directly experiences Hautfort's temper and is greatly perturbed by the latter's desire to reduce all workers to obedient drones deprived of their humanity, while Hautfort rules over them as 'le grand ordonnateur' [the great computer].[85]

As the 'remotivation' programme progresses, the psychological and physical strains on the participants intensify. However, Denis is able to subvert its adverse effects in numerous ways, including encouraging participants to interact socially for the first time, so that they no longer feel they are isolated individuals. Somewhat mischievously, he also secures Sabine's acceptance to include an exercise in the programme in which all six participants will analyse a major literary work by Proust, Rimbaud or Baudelaire, and then rewrite it using the organisation's approved terminology, so that the resulting texts are shorter, strictly to the point – and, most certainly, have no literary merit! As Denis boasts to delegates with his tongue firmly in his cheek, and deliberately in clear view of Sabine's live, but supposedly hidden, spy camera, this is their chance to make a cultural contribution and they will each be graded according to the speed with which they complete the task.[86] This initiative also has echoes of the game playing found in Jaubertie's play discussed in Chapter 2.[87]

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[84] Arfel, *Des clous* (2010), pp. 152–155.

[85] Arfel, *Des clous* (2010), p. 217.

[86] Arfel, *Des clous* (2010), pp. 205–206.

[87] Jaubertie, *Boxon(s)* (2018).

Denis establishes regular social gatherings of programme participants at a café that he frequents where Sonia's children are looked after by the café owner's family.[88] He manages to secure the active engagement of four of the six participants who together build a strong social bond and develop mutual trust for the first time.[89]

As the novel draws to a close, somewhat fortuitously, Hautfort, whose growing megalomania includes a belief in the eternal growth of HT, has a seizure and is left temporarily mute and paralysed in hospital. Subsequently, Sabine discovers, when examining the company's official records, that Hautfort had forgotten to change the name of the person originally designated as his interim emergency replacement in the event of his incapacity. This is still Catherine, his first-ever senior employee.[90]

Catherine takes on this role with gusto and arranges for the seminar delegates to have career counselling and to resign with equitable financial compensation. She tells Sonia that with all her back problems she is entitled to long-term sick leave or even an invalidity pension paid for by the company. Sonia refuses the offer of such a pension because she believes it would be tantamount to conceding that the organisation has won by eliminating her from the labour market. Instead she opts for a period of sick leave and the possibility that:

> Dans quelques mois, un an peut-être, mon temps se partagera entres mes études et mes appels.
>
> [In several months, perhaps a year, I'll split my time between my studies and my calls.]

Under no circumstances will she ever return to a full-time job as a call handler.[91]

Sadly, we learn that these changes come too late for one of the six, Marc, a failing salesman, who has taken his own life.[92] Hautfort is removed by the shareholders and HT is eventually sold off, to their joy, for a considerable profit.[93]

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[88] Arfel, *Des clous* (2010), p. 195.

[89] Arfel, *Des clous* (2010), p. 251.

[90] Arfel, *Des clous* (2010), pp. 272–273.

[91] Arfel, *Des clous* (2010), pp. 290–292.

[92] Arfel, *Des clous* (2010), p. 298.

In summary, this is an allegorical tale that deals with misuse of power by management of a neoliberal organisation. However, Arfel provides the reader with a positive resolution which allows decency and moderation the final say. Taken as a whole, it is difficult to imagine how all these elements could come together to such an extreme degree in a single organisation. However, some of the negative management behaviour described in this novel appears at least within the bounds of the plausible, particularly in terms of the imaginative ways workers are psychologically tormented by the improper exercise of organisational power, as well as its negative impact beyond their place of work.[94]

Les nouveaux barbares

Frédéric El Kaïm's play provides an intensely acute analysis of individual suffering that flows from the callous management decision to dismiss a worker, Alexandre, for 'manque de motivation' following the death of his young son, an only child, from a cerebral haemorrhage. The play portrays a neoliberal organisation that is only interested in regarding individuals as economic units, not as rounded social beings. It examines how this decision gradually impacts individuals at all levels of the organisation. The tragic death of this child was a factual event gleaned by El Kaïm from a newspaper article. This play itself provides a way to examine and critique the very narrow limits of compassion in a neoliberal organisation through a series of imagined discourses:

> De cette histoire sordide nous n'avons gardé que le point de départ. Un homme est licencié après le décès de son fils au motif qu'il aurait manqué de motivation pendant les dernières semaines de sa maladie.

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[93] Arfel, *Des clous* (2010) épilogues, pp. 308–315.

[94] Dominique Lhuilier, *Placardisés: des exclus dans l'entreprise* (Paris: Seul, 2002).

> [From this sordid story we've only retained the starting point. A man is dismissed after the death of his son on the grounds that he lacked motivation during the last weeks of his illness.][95]

El Kaïm has meticulously constructed his narrative of imagined consequences clearly to demonstrate how ill-conceived business decisions, taken in an environment where economic rationality is the sole organisational motivator, detrimentally influence the lives of managers and workers and can put the future of an organisation at risk. In particular, the play reveals how private challenges inevitably invade and influence working lives and vice versa. In a sense, the core action of dismissal and its ramifications may be thought of as testing the humanity of all the protagonists represented in the play. At no time is the audience left in any doubt that the organisation's approach to managing people is extremely brutal. For instance:

> PDG: Quand vous procurez du travail, à ceux qui ne sont pas capables de le créer, vous êtes tout puissant. Un salarié soumet toujours son désir à celui d'un entrepreneur. Le contrat de travail n'est que l'acceptation d'une soumission. La grande masse des employés remet son désir entre nos mains.
>
> [CEO: When you provide work to those not able to create it, you're all-powerful. Workers always surrender their desires to those of an entrepreneur. The employment contract is only the acceptance of a submission. Most workers place their desires into our hands].[96]

Among other things, El Kaïm's play examines the union's reluctance to officially support Alexandre because he is not a union member. Local union representatives are at odds here. One of them believes that the union is reneging on its responsibilities to the working class and encourages others to work with him to support Alexandre.[97] He remarks, in the face of opposition from union colleagues:

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[95] From a 2015 interview with Frédéric El Kaïm by the web journal, *Théâtrorama* [online] <http://www.theatrorama.com/actualites/en-coulisse/les-nouveaux-barbares-de-frederic-el-kaim/http://www.theatrorama.com/actualites/en-coulisse/les-nouveaux-barbares-de-frederic-el-kaim/> [accessed 07/02/2018].

[96] El Kaïm, *Les nouveaux* (2014) s. 15, p. 45.

[97] El Kaïm, *Les nouveaux* (2014) s. 2, pp. 5–6.

> C'est plus une question du syndicat, c'est une question d'entraide.
>
> [This isn't about the union. It's about mutual support.][98]

This debate is essentially a pragmatic reflection on whether workmates should always help others as colleagues, not just as union members. It is not a political but rather a social concern. Alexandre's isolation and mental suffering are invariably at the forefront of discussion, not the need to rid society of the imbalance of power between capital and labour. As union representative, Paul, points out:

> Oui mais tous leurs mots là, ça commence à faire chier. Comme on peut plus dire camarade, on dit copain, et du coup on a plus que des copains syndiqués, les autres c'est plus des copains. Ils peuvent crever la bouche ouverte … Moi je dis qu'il faut l'aider et qu'on les emmerde. Si t'écoutes la fédé à Paris tu peux plus défendre personne.
>
> [Yes, but all their words are starting to piss me off. As we can't say 'comrade' anymore, we say 'friend', and so our only friends are union members, others are no longer friends. They can die with their mouths wide open … I say we should help him and fuck them. If you listen to the federation in Paris you can't defend anyone.][99]

This debate also reflects, in general terms, the parlous state of the French trade union movement where, according to latest official statistics, under 9 per cent of the private sector workforce is unionised, reflecting the success of neoliberalism to eat away at the notion of working-class identity through individualisation of workers contractual terms, reduction of job security and encouraging competition between workers.[100]

[98] El Kaïm, *Les nouveaux* (2014) s. 2, p. 5.

[99] El Kaïm, *Les nouveaux* (2014) s. 2, p. 5.

[100] In the French public sector, unionisation is around 20 per cent. La syndicalisation en France: Des salariés deux fois plus syndiqués dans la fonction publique, *Dares, analyses*, May 2016 [online] <https://dares.travail-emploi.gouv.fr/dares-etudes-et-statistiques/etudes-et-syntheses/dares-analyses-dares-indicateurs-dares-resultats/article/la-syndicalisation-en-france> [accessed 09/12/2019]. It is perhaps worth noting that *the comparable figures for the UK are 13.5 per cent and 51.8 per cent respectively for private and public sector unionisation. Carl Rooper, Trade union membership is growing, but there's still work to do, 31/05/2018 tuc.org.uk [online]* <https://www.tuc.org.uk/blogs/trade-union-membership-growing-there's-still-work-do> [accessed 09/12/2019].

This play also draws attention to the indiscriminate use of power where, for instance, the chief executive brings a management team together to sit around a table and discuss workforce reductions. However, the matter has already been decided, so that when the last manager to arrive at the meeting sits on the single remaining seat, the only red one in the room, the chief executive makes it clear that this chair is for the individual being fired.[101]

This play has a complex structure which incorporates constant shifts between different dramatic moods, including comedy, tragedy, realism and the surreal. Across eighteen scenes, some subdivided, the play liberally blends 'realistically' acted events with farce – the latter signalled to the audience in the available videoed production – by actors wearing ill-fitting wigs.

Exposition of the entire narrative is essentially 'theatrical' in nature. For instance, in the opening scene, which could easily find a place in a classical Greek tragedy, Isabelle Lenoir grieves noisily in half-light upstage, while her husband, Alexandre, talks movingly to the audience through a microphone, about the death of their son, Thomas, and the impact of this tragic event on their lives and marriage.

This story demonstrates repeatedly how individual difference and personal values come into conflict with blanket organisational standards applied at different levels of the hierarchy. For instance, following his dismissal of Alexandre, HR director Pernaud lifts the veil on a personal dilemma by speaking directly to the audience in a monologue. He explains that despite this action against Alexandre, he has struggled inwardly to toe the corporate line and considers that the rationale for this decision, in the context of a child's recent death, overwhelmingly demonstrates the organisation has 'franchi la ligne jaune ['has crossed the yellow line']'. His disillusionment is such that he has found another job and plans to resign.[102]

Subsequently, we learn how Alexandre's dismissal has stigmatised him in the minds of his colleagues in a way that it is impossible for him to address:

> Alex, avec son odeur de mort qui le quittera plus, il respire plus les bénéfices. C'est pour ça qu'il l'ont licencié. La mort, c'est pas bon pour les affaires.

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[101] El Kaïm, *Les nouveaux* (2014) s.11, p. 31.
[102] El Kaïm, *Les nouveaux* (2014) s. 4, p. 14.

> [Alex, with the stench of death that will always cling to him, no longer breaths profits. That's why they fired him. Death isn't good for business.]

Meanwhile, a union representative, Michel, whose son was killed in a car accident, some years before the events of the play, notes bitterly that the death of a child reveals the true nature of relationships with work colleagues because they sometimes ignore a grieving workmate, finding it hard to engage emotionally with them. Meanwhile, Roland, yet another representative, reflects on the powerlessness of individuals in the face of the complexities of modern life, including when organisations have stripped work of its meaning:

> Ils sont en train de foutre le travail en l'air. Ça sert ça quoi le travail si ça doit nous rendre malade. Le travail ça devrait nous faire vivre mais ça en fait mourir de plus en plus. Alors ça sert à quoi ?
>
> [They're screwing around with (the meaning of) work. What's the point of work if it makes you ill? Work should make us live, but it makes more and more of us die. So what is the point ?][103]

This is a question that recalls Alain Erhenberg's view, discussed in Chapter 1, that sensitivity about employment issues in France stems from a collective over-investment in the world of work.

Relationships between Alexandre, union representatives and indeed the workforce as a whole are further tested as a consequence of a radio interview he gives to a journalist (performed in the videoed production in blackout as a pre-recorded piece). The journalist asks Alexandre whether he thinks customers should boycott the company.[104] He responds negatively saying that such action would penalise workers who would inevitably lose their jobs too. However, the mere fact that the case has now been aired in the media does indeed lead Alexandre's former employers to lose business, with a predictable negative impact on his ex-colleagues. Alexandre is then blamed by the union representatives for giving the interview in the first place.[105]

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[103] El Kaïm, *Les nouveaux* (2014) s.8, p. 23.

[104] El Kaïm, *Les nouveaux* (2014) s.12, p. 2.8.

[105] El Kaïm, *Les nouveaux* (2014) s.12, p. 35.

The radio interview has other consequences – all of which demonstrate how individuals in authority, despite, or perhaps because of, the threat to their own job security, can act in a deceitful and savage manner to protect themselves by supporting the dubious behaviour of senior executives.

For instance, we witness a brief scene in which a trainer encourages a group of managers to develop their capability to deploy phrases about dismissing workers that deliberately and cynically supplant real meaning with ambiguous business terminology. This scene ends with the chilling declaration by one participant who excitedly shouts, in a manner that echoes Christophe Dejours' study on 'la banalisation du mal':

> Oui! Oui! Oui! Oui! On dit pas 'extermination des juifs' mais 'solution finale'. Voilà. C'est ça qu'on dit.
>
> [Yes! Yes! Yes! Yes! We don't say 'extermination of the Jews' but 'final solution'. That's it. That's what we say.][106]

Organisational malevolence and the absurd also combine in a scene in a men's urinal, represented minimally in the videoed production by two tables upturned on their ends with one actor behind each of them. Here, the audience witnesses a manager belligerently urging his subordinate, Berthier, to take a tougher line when dismissing his own staff. Berthier, already emotionally overwrought because of increased job pressure, hastily snorts cocaine given to him by his boss. This action takes place in a way that suggests this drug is taken routinely as a confidence booster. Then, when one of Berthier's own subordinates enters and complains that his nerves are in shreds because of constant organisational change, Berthier, who has now embraced the full effects of the cocaine, indifferently informs him that he will soon have more time to relax because he is to lose his job.[107] The theatrical and comic nature of this scene belies its content because it brings the narrow philosophy of economic man, promoted by the organisation, in direct conflict with the suffering produced at individual level by such a narrow approach to people management with its complete lack of human empathy. This is subsequently brought into even sharper focus when the subordinate's dead body is found on stage following his suicide.[108]

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[106] El Kaïm, *Les nouveaux* (2014) s.16, interlude pp. 51–52.

[107] El Kaïm, *Les nouveaux* (2014) s.12, p. 34.

As negative publicity and economic pressure on the business continues to bite, workplace bullying and dismissals escalate until the Group's owner, Rabaud, telephones the chief executive ordering her to make a public apology for the 'maladresse face à une salarié' ['clumsiness regarding a worker']; and then to reinstate Alexandre while putting all the blame on outgoing HR director, Pernaud, who is to be used as a scapegoat.[109] Pernaud's replacement, Blanchard, takes on this role with overwhelming zeal and, in a monologue to the audience, explains that his own tough line is the result of his family history. He comes from an immigrant family where his father always struggled financially and lived:

> Une vie sacrifiée pour un travail de merde, puis le chômage, la honte vis-à-vis de nous parce qu'il ne pouvez rien nous en offrir.
>
> [A life sacrificed for a shitty job, then unemployment, shame on us it can't offer us anything.][110]

Blanchard is therefore willing to be a fully-fledged disciple of the company as a deliberate strategy to achieve his personal ends, but the audience is left with the feeling that, given the vigorously Machiavellian nature of the organisation, Blanchard will be no more secure in this role than his predecessor has been.[111]

As the play comes to a close Alexandre and his wife, Isabelle, driven apart by their son's death, hold each other closely in mutual comfort. The audience is clear that there will be no magic resolution to the couple's mental suffering, just a lengthy period of misery where the pain may be diluted over time.

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[108] El Kaïm, *Les nouveaux* (2014) s.16, p. 53.

[109] El Kaïm, *Les nouveaux* (2014) s.14, p. 44.

[110] El Kaïm, *Les nouveaux* (2014) s.16, p. 49.

[111] Niccolo Machiavelli, *The Prince* (London: Penguin, 2011 edition) Originally published in Italian circa 1513.

Concluding comments

All these stories show how, for process-driven jobs in particular, neoliberal organisations design and employ less than comprehensive models of human behaviour, including deconstructing individual jobs into broad quantifiable outputs, such as a method that establishes how ‘customer satisfaction’ can best be calculated. This, in turn, can be broken down into discrete levels of achievement to determine the extent to which the individual has failed to achieve, met or exceeded the particular job standard. This approach appears to provides a consistently poor framework for measuring performance. Among other things, it ignores the degree of control the individual worker has over the work environment. For instance, returning to the telephone call-centre example provided by Beinstingel, call handlers clearly have no control over availability of the power supply, the quality of any equipment supplied to customers, especially when made by an external supplier, or even the rate of sector innovation where a technological breakthrough may lead to a sudden fall in demand for an established product following the arrival of a new market entrant seen by customers as having a unique technological advantage. Further, as already discussed, this model fails to take account of what motivates people beyond financial reward, including being treated with dignity. Indeed, it might be argued that such frameworks, taken to the extreme, because they respond solely to the fundamental business desire to boost economic benefit at the exclusion of everything else, deny workers the ability to fulfil themselves as rounded individuals both within and beyond the workplace.

Current evidence of psychosocial suffering, mirrored in Catherine’s ‘placardisation’ in *Des clous* and other stories suggests that, in the final analysis, as with Beinstingel’s fictional protagonist ‘Éric’, the sole responsibility rests on workers to determine their own destinies.[112] In practice, this situation seems to be somewhat more nuanced given a 2010 French Supreme Court case which makes employers strictly liable for the physical and mental health of their employees in the workplace.[113] However, this does not prevent an organisation successfully arguing as a defence that the root cause of the malaise is not work-related.

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[112] Thierry Beinstingeléématiques et histoires singulières, *Modern & Contemporary France*, 2018 [online] <https://doi.org/10.1080/09639489.2018.1447915> [accessed 20/07/2018].

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[113] Dominique Roumaneix, Harcèlement moral: la responsabilité de l'employeur fait l'objet d'un durcissement par les tribunaux, *village-justice.com*, 22/04/2011 [online] <https://www.village-justice.com/articles/Harcelement-moral-responsabilite>, 10083.html [accessed 25/02/2020].

CHAPTER 4

Brain over brawn: Psychological violence in the era of knowledge work

> Dans un monde en mutation permanent et rapide, l'entreprise est sans cesse confrontée à une multiplicité de risques, à un avenir incertain. La maitrise de l'information devient le facteur décisif pour celle qui souhaite maintenir un très haut niveau de compétitivité.
>
> [In a world of permanent and rapid change, business constantly faces a multiplicity of risks and an uncertain future. Mastery over information becomes the decisive factor for those wanting to maintain a very high level of competitiveness.][1]

In contrast to Chapter 3, with its examination of how measurement and control encourages psychological violence with respect to routinised work, this chapter critically analyses the phenomenon of knowledge working in contemporary organisations and the forms of psychological violence to which it gives rise from the perspective of social science commentaries on the modern workplace and three stories which scrutinise the experience of 'knowledge workers' within the neoliberal environment.

Yann Moulier Boutang provides a key critical resource here through his concept of 'cognitive capitalism' which argues that today's organisational prime assets reside in people's heads, not their hands.[2] Knowledge workers therefore add value by manipulating and interpreting available information to produce new knowledge.[3] Moulier Boutang contrasts the reliance on physical capabilities under industrial capitalism with neoliberalism's priority need for economic value creation through knowledge accumulation that then encourages extraction of mental and emotional capital from knowledge workers so this truly becomes part of the organisation's assets.[4]

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[1] Thomas Coppey, *Potentiel du sinistre* (Arles: Actes sud, 2013), p. 53.

[2] Yann Moulier Boutang, *Cognitive Capitalism*, trans. Ed Emery (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2011).

[3] Jean-Pierre Bouchez, Manager des travailleurs professionnels du savoir: Enjeux et perspectives, *Revue française de gestion*, 2006/9 n° 168–169, pp. 35–53 [online] <https://www.cairn.info/revue-francaise-de-gestion-2006-9-page-35.htm> [accessed 20/11/2019].

Knowledge work is considered 'immaterial' in the sense that its output is primarily intellectual and affective and not a physical commodity as such. It can be facilitated by an organisation's technological capability to manipulate data that is then interrogated by knowledge workers who cooperate with one another to create collective learning on behalf of the organisation.[5] Relationships between groups of such workers are extremely varied and include strategic partnerships, distributed and virtual networks and short-term alliances, all making highly developed interpersonal skills a key capability. In such instances, complex organisational control systems frequently operate 'invisibly' in the background, eradicate the need for direct human supervision and are all based on pervasive operating standards to facilitate performance measurement. These may include internal departmental comparisons and external benchmarking with competitors.[6]

By contrast, 'material' work may be said to be that carried out by today's 'operational' workers whose routine tasks are set down in established procedures. These latter workers do not necessarily 'get their hand dirty' but they do utilise existing learning in support of their work – such as a call-handler's 'Frequently Asked Questions' reference guide. These guides constitute a 'material' resource used as part of a required procedure that such workers are mandated to follow. As the economist, Michel Volle puts it:

> Les tâches répétitives étant prises en charge par des automates, l'emploi est consacré aux tâches qui demandent discernement et initiative. Il ne s'agit plus de 'main-d'œuvre', mais de 'cerveau-d'œuvre'.

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[4] Yann Mulier Boutang, *Le capitalisme cognitif*, trans. Ed Emery (Cambridge UK: Polity Press, 2011).

[5] Maurizio Lazzarato, Immaterial Labour, *generation-online* [online] <http://www.generation-online.org/c/fcimmateriallabour3.htm> [accessed 22/11/2019].

[6] Guy Deleuze, Post-scriptum sur les sociétés de contrôle, in *L'autre journal*, n°1, mai 1990 [online] <http://aejcpp.free.fr/articles/controle_deleuze.htm> [accessed 14/03/2018].

> [While repetitive tasks are taken over by machines, employment focusses on tasks that require judgement and initiative. It is no longer a question of 'manpower', but of 'brainpower'].[7]

It also seems obvious that in contemporary organisations, where people are managed at a distance through digital information processes, the quality of management-worker communications is critical to effective operating and so the way communications channels are actually used may provide another potential source of psychological pressure on workers. Philosophers Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri argue that today, with the shift from physical to intellectual skills and the requirement for geographical mobility and flexibility, organisational levers of coercion and control, including communications channels, have become increasingly important. They maintain that 'capitalist exploitation' has infiltrated all areas of the globe thanks to digitalisation beyond what was once known as 'the industrialised world' so that physical geography has truly become irrelevant. In other words:

> Empire is the non-place of world production where labor is exploited.[8]

Knowledge creation, performance measurement and 'value'

Knowledge working presents an enormous challenge for organisations because it requires them to find ways to engage workers deeply in long-term commercial success not just here-and-now task completion. This means creating and sustaining a climate where worker commitment and the generation of financially profitable ideas are considered a permanent feature of individual life within and beyond the physical workplace by effectively nurturing a sense of organisational belonging and of the centrality of knowledge workers to organisational success.

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[7] Bruno Abescat et Benjamin Masse-Stamberger, Michel Volle: 'Nous vivons la troisième révolution industrielle' *lexpansion.lexpress.fr*, 22/02/2013 [online] <https://lexpansion.lexpress.fr/actualite-economique/michel-volle-nous-vivons-la-troisieme-revolution-industrielle_1432825.html> [accessed 22/11/2019].

[8] Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), pp. 209–210.

The Italian Marxist philosopher, Franco Berardi, equates this condition with what he terms 'the subjugation of this soul to work processes'.[9] The notion of the 'soul' here is not a spiritual entity but rather the construction of a deep bond between organisation and worker, where the latter willingly subordinates any instinctual needs to gain personal fulfillment and effectively agrees, as a priority, to act as a conduit to improve the wellbeing of the organisation. However, even where the individual makes this transition, at the risk of loss of personal and social identity, they may reach a point where their devotion to knowledge creation runs counter to the organisation's ultimate and exclusive preoccupation with monetising work outputs. This can leave the individual disconnected from their employment, as well as their very existence, as they sink into a state of despair, feeling guilt, shame and self-loathing because of their perceived failure to tap into what they believe is their full potential on behalf of an employer who they feel has treated them generously in terms of financial rewards, relative job security and social status. However, neoliberal organisations are clearly not altruistic in nature. Their treatment of knowledge workers is based on a sophisticated give-and-take arrangement where the organisation controls costs at all times. For instance, it can be argued that modern performance bonus schemes, while offering the prospect of greater financial reward, ensure such incentives are strictly regulated by HR. They may therefore create an opportunity for a generous bonus beyond basic pay, but at the same time, operating rules ensure that the scale of such payments is tightly controlled. This view is supported by sociologists Luc Boltanski and Ève Chiapello who reflect that organisations use individual incentives as an instrument of management control to encourage:

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[9] Franco Beradi, *The Soul at Work: From Alienation to Autonomy* (Los Angeles, CA: Semiotxt[e], 2009), p. 24 [online] <https://libcom.org/files/Franco%20%27%27Bifo%27%27%20Berardi%20-%20The%20Soul%20at%20Work%20From%20Alienation%20to%20Autonomy.pdf> [accessed 24/01/2019].

> … un syndicalisme désorienté et qui a perdu l'initiative de l'action.
>
> […a form of disoriented trade unionism that has lost the initiative for action.]

that is, to help freeze out any prospect of collective solidarity.[10]

These authors also note that under neoliberalism financial reward has increasingly been considered as the personal property of workers and not tied to a particular job. On the other hand, a worker's individual contribution to the organisation is a function of their individual performance as evaluated by management.[11] This latter therefore acts as another way to pressure workers.

Organisations do not appear, however, to be excessively wedded to individual incentive schemes because a recent study reveals that, in many schemes introduced in the 1980s and 1990s, individual bonus awards were replaced by 'primes à la performance collective'.[12] Such schemes may be seen as an important adjunct to the arsenal of weaponry organisations deploy to incentivise individual worker performance. This is because they introduce the notion of peer pressure as an additional source of psychosocial stress where individual team members urge their less skilled and/or hard-working colleagues to exert more effort so that team bonus potential is maximised. This may create opportunities for psychological violence, including name-calling by peers towards less capable team members. Thus, rather than promoting teamwork, such schemes may well have the opposite effect. This then represents an example of Gaulejac and Hanique's notion of 'le capitalisme paradoxant' ['paradoxical capitalism'].[13]

Therefore, the relationship between organisations and their knowledge workers appears very different from that of workers in routinised jobs discussed in the previous chapter that are based on the application of existing knowledge, rather than new ideas.

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[10] Luc Boltanski and Ève Chiapello, *Le nouvel esprit du capitalisme* (Paris: Gallimard, 2011, Second edition), p. 260.

[11] Boltanski and Chiapello, *Nouvel esprit* (2011), p. 369.

[12] Nicolas Gastel et al., *La négociation salariale au prisme des politiques de rémunération en France* [online] <https://www.cairn.info/revue-de-l-ires-2011-3-page-89.htm> " \l "no1 [accessed 06/01/2018].

[13] Vincent de Gaulejac and Fabienne Hanique, *Le capitalisme paradoxant* (Paris: Seuil, 2015).

Habitually attempting to 'measure' the performance of knowledge workers on the basis of their intellectual outputs presents another quandary for both organisations and knowledge workers. This is because the ideas created by knowledge workers are often invisible, free-flowing and sometimes surface unexpectedly. Their very 'immaterial' or intangible nature means that such ideas may well be on a path to some kind of discovery but possibly unquantifiable in themselves. So, even where a 'value' is attributed to them, there is no guarantee that it will be accurate or meaningful.[14] For instance, in pharmaceuticals, it may take decades for researchers to discover a drug that effectively treats a particular cancer; while by happenstance, this research may reveal another drug that cures a different type of cancer and this turns out to be more financially profitable to research.

In addition, in the era of what Danièle Linhart calls 'la sur-humanisation managériale' organisations have developed a broad array of non-financial benefits, targetted at knowledge workers including providing quiet, luxurious offices, child-minding services and wellbeing programmes. Coupled with coercive messaging, these initiatives encourage the notion that organisational and individual objectives are completely aligned so that workers' talents can be fully exploited.[15]

Yves Clot and Michel Gollac believe that wellbeing initiatives to help individuals manage stress are, in reality, merely a 'pot-pourri' of lessons about a healthy lifestyle with no connection to work as such. This creates a vicious circle of behaviour incorporating:

> … leçons de morale potentiellement nocives [… potentially harmful moral lessons].[16]

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[14] Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (New York: Penguin Books, 2004).

[15] Danièle Linhart, *La comédie humaine de travail* (Toulouse: Érès, 2015). See also: Richard Florida, "The Rise of the Creative Class," *The Washington Monthly*, May 2002, p. 16 [online] <https://www.os3.nl/_media/2009-2010/courses/icp/richard_florida_-_the_rise_of_the_creative_class.pdf> [accessed 27/02/2019] and Coppey, *Potentiel* (2013), pp. 22–23.

[16] Yves Clot and Michel Gollac, *Le travail peut-il devenir supportable?* (Paris: Armand Colin: 2017, Second edition), pp. 34–35.

Moreover, in their critical analysis of wellness initiatives, Carl Cederström and André Spicer cite research that just over half of US employers with over fifty staff offer workplace wellness programmes, although there appears to be no credible way of measuring business impact. They claim that the success of such schemes is their ability to generate guilt and make us feel outsiders if we fail to comply:

> Healthy bodies are productive bodies. They are good for business.[17]

Conceivably, when corporate ideology collides with the personal pursuit for corporal perfection, modern organisations have another coercive instrument to improve individual performance.[18]

At a very general level, it could be maintained that today's knowledge workers live to work; unlike many workers in repetitive, routinised jobs who work to live. The building blocks of Bourdieu's organisational model, outlined in Chapter 1, remain relevant but here have morphed. This is to say that, intellectual capital possessed by individuals has now become the organisation's prime asset, while professional values and beliefs sometimes conflict with those of the organisation itself and such tensions may cause an erosion in mutual interests. This might occur, say, where there is a conflict between an organisation's view of 'economic' and 'adequate' product design, while the immensely skilled knowledge worker seeks a more costly and elaborate solution. Friction can also arise from the use of specialist jargon by technical teams that deliberately mystifies outsiders and so helps to separate knowledge workers in different specialisms from each other, as well as from their line managers and executives.

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[17] Carl Cederström and André Spicer, *The Wellness Syndrome* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2015, Kindle edition).

[18] These writers are also critical of the growth of 'lifestyle' coaching. This is considered merely 'a technique aimed at reshaping the self', rather than a support for self-improvement. They note that wellness and associated 'mindfulness' initiatives have proven particularly successful in start-up IT companies where it is considered 'cool' to work long hours by eradicating differences between personal life and work. Andrew Ross has labelled this approach 'geeksploitation'. Andrew Ross, *No-collar – The Humane Workplace and Its Hidden Costs* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2003), p. 143.

Knowledge work in storytelling

The stories analysed in this chapter specifically reflect the economic shift in recent decades away from physical work, to jobs in many areas of employment, including technology, finance, marketing, human resources and project management, where advances in knowledge are crucial to sustain commercial competitive advantage and only made possible through availability of information whose access is facilitated by technology. Each story raises the issue of the potential for contradiction between personal integrity and organisational objectives by examining the internal psychic struggle within knowledge workers who, paradoxically, want to be engaged more deeply with the organisation but, at the same time demand autonomy, self-management and creativity.[19] Arguably, this latter tension has been fostered by an explosion in higher education in France since World War II, but now thwarted by neoliberalism's technological advances since the 1980s, where digitised control processes and standardisation, including in performance management, have encouraged greater not less control over work.[20]

These stories also illustrate the changing nature of people management since the advent of neoliberalism and its implications about how psychological bullying, defined earlier as symbolic or systemic violence, manifests itself. They explore how these changes have addressed the challenges for workers of meeting their personal unwritten, implicit expectations for work–life balance and dignity of treatment.[21]

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[19] My own organisational work experience suggests that this tension can manifest itself where knowledge workers resist sharing the knowledge they have accumulated during employment by either physically holding on to information in hard copy or blocking computer file access through a protective password. In both cases, they consider knowledge, like their pay rate, to be their personal intellectual capital and they just don't share it.

[20] Boltanski and Chiapello, *Le nouvel esprit* (2011), pp. 263–264.

[21] David Guest, "Perspectives on the Study of Work-Life Balance," *Social Science Information* 41, no. 2 (June 2002): pp. 255–279 [online] <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/249732902_Perspectives_on_the_Study_of_Work-Life_Balance/download> [accessed 07/03/2019]. See also: Sandra L. Robinson

Each story focusses on protagonists who initially gain immense satisfaction from their work, both because of the intrinsic pleasure it gives them and its extrinsic benefits, including high pay levels, extensive benefits and a comfortable lifestyle. However, they each come to realise they are trapped because the working environment can be psychologically bruising, given the constant organisational pressure to sustain and even accelerate individual levels of performance. One of the many challenges for these workers is that, while their jobs are essentially cerebral, and immediate outputs may be intangible, organisations insist on routinely assessing performance by 'measuring' abstract qualities as if they were concrete, such as:

> la motivation, l'aptitude à apprendre et l'expertise fonctionnelle encore inexploitée [qui] déterminent le potentiel.
>
> [motivation, learning ability and untapped functional expertise [which] determines potential].[22]

These stories all examine the situation of knowledge workers who are faced with a 'double bind'.[23] They feel emotionally tethered to their work and organisation because of the sense of self-value this generates, but at the same time they sense that their full potential as social beings is being restricted by their ubiquitous relationship with work. This means that, whatever they do, they feel they can never respond appropriately to their situation. This increases their mental confusion and psychological suffering. Emotionally, they are stuck fast and it may well be in the organisation's interests to keep them locked down, given the high level of financial investment made to recruit, nurture and acculturate these individuals.

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and Denise M. Rousseau, "Violating the Psychological Contract: Not the Exception but the Norm," *Journal of Organizational Behavior* 15 (1994): pp. 245–259 [online] <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2488448?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents> [accessed 23/01/2019].

[22] Coppey, *Potentiel* (2013), p. 35.

[23] Gregory Bateson, *Mind and Nature: A Necessary Unity* (New York: Bantam Books, 1979).

It may be that Foucault's observation on the social use of ridicule and shame are of relevance here. He maintains that such forms of psychological pressure have long been used as a form of punishment in society because they dissuade individuals from offending against the prevailing rules of social order, that is, within the context of this chapter, they encourage workers who feel they are being pulled in different directions psychologically to prioritise organisational needs even where this negatively impacts their individual sense of dignity and respect.[24] Recently, the French Cour de Cassation, the country's Supreme Court, provided a contemporary example of business shaming practices by ruling that 'harcèlement moral' includes marginalising a worker when management ordered their colleagues *not* to speak to them and also questioned the worker's psychological state without evidential grounds for doing so.[25] This can be viewed as an illustration of 'placardisation' ['cloistering'], the management practice of encouraging a worker to resign by creating an intolerable work environment, and, in so doing, attempting to circumvent the statutory employer duty to pay compensation in the event of unfair dismissal.[26]

Echoing both Foucault's and Bauman's ideas on social control, Dominique Lhuilier concludes that the most repugnant feature of this form of psychological violence is the insidious impact it has on:

> des pairs, des collègues, des proches, qui s'arc-boutent autour d'un pacte de silence, qui détournent le regard, pensant ainsi se préserver de la contamination du malheur ou ne se sachant pas comment s'engager dans la défense du placardisé …
>
> [peers, colleagues, relatives, who maintain a pact of silence, who look the other way, thinking that they are protecting themselves from the contamination of the misfortune or not knowing how to engage in the defence of the isolated …].[27]

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[24] Michel Foucault, *Surveiller et punir: naissance de la prison* (NRF Éditions Gallimard, 1975), pp. 106–107.

[25] Cour de Cassation, Chambre sociale, Audience publique du 29/06/2005 N° de pourvoi: 03-44055 [online] <https://www.journaldunet.fr/management/1206667-placardisation-definition-jurisprudence/>.

[26] Dominique Lhuilier, *Placardisés : des exclus dans l'entreprise* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2002). See also : Placardisation: définition, jurisprudence… [online] <https://www.journaldunet.fr/management/1206667-%20placardisation-%20definition-jurisprudence/> [accessed 30/10/2018].

[27] Lhuilier, *Placardisés* (2002), p. 225.

There are examples of this kind of behaviour in the stories analysed here.

These stories are : Thomas Coppey's darkly satirical novel, *Potentiel du sinistre*, Jean-Marc Moutot's film, *Violence des Échanges en milieu tempéré*, and a second novel, Alexandre Lacroix's *L'homme qui aimait trop travailler*. Coppey's novel, which lies at the heart of this chapter, provides general insights into the overall career of a knowledge worker, whereas Moutout's film illustrates how a newly recruited management consultant, in his first job, sacrifices his personal life to neoliberalism. In sharp contrast, Lacroix's novel focuses on the end of a knowledge worker's career. It examines the fate of a dedicated, long-serving, embittered and friendless knowledge worker as his life draws unexpectedly to a close.

Potentiel du sinistre

Coppey's third-person narrative focusses on the career, lived experience and often self-inflicted, but organisationally induced, psychological pressure on Chanard, a financial markets specialist who develops an innovative, but ethically questionable, insurance product for the French subsidiary of a US investment bank. Over a six-year period, this novel follows Chanard's sometimes tense relationship with his wife Céline, and the growth of daughter Capucine, new-born at the start of the novel.

Chanard, typical of today's knowledge workers, lives by his specialist knowledge and skills, especially his ability to make deep mental connections using masses of data. He then works with similarly skilled colleagues to apply these discoveries to create new business products and services. As explained earlier, the representation of this pattern of working reflects how today's businesses seek to engage and retain creatives, specialists or thought leaders who provide them with their competitive edge.

Coppey's novel demonstrates how monitoring and control have evolved under neoliberalism. Psychological pressure is applied as much by Chanard's expectations of himself as it is by the organisation. This latter uses technology to deliver individual progress reports on Chanard's performance as well as its expectations of what needs to be achieved by when, while the physical geographical location of management remains largely irrelevant.[28]

Paradoxically, for knowledge workers like Chanard, operating standards, a deeply embedded feature of neoliberalism, may run counter to the need for innovation because they assume limits to human creativity, that is, there is usually a definition, however vague, that describes a maximum level of performance. So, the very existence of pervasive performance standards may actually operate as an inhibitor of performance because, in actuality, the frontiers of human potential are, conceivably, unknown.

Furthermore, knowledge workers need to be attracted, recruited and retained by organisations. Thus, Coppey's Chanard is well-rewarded and well-treated by his new employers. He is flattered to have been recruited by such a prestigious entity.

Psychological violence takes many forms. In Coppey's novel, the organisation often uses words to insinuate ideas into workers' minds, such as at recruitment when Chanard is handed a glossy corporate brochure that proclaims a broad, coercive gospel about how workers should think and behave so they excel as organisational apostles, culminating in the commandment:

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[28] Coppey, *Potentiel* (2013), p. 17. Conversely, as argued in earlier chapters, under industrial capitalism workers were closely monitored and controlled through face-to-face supervision of their work. Organisations sometimes address this 'war for talent' by hiring intermediary 'head-hunters' to pinpoint, contact and establish long-term relationships with high-fliers in competitor organisations in order eventually to entice them to work for their own client years before they are actually recruited. Ed Michaels, Helen Handfield-Jones, and Beth Axelrod, *The War for Talent* (Brighton, MA: Harvard Business Press, 2001). The alternative of acquiring and seeking to integrate established groups of independent-minded knowledge workers into large neoliberal bureaucracies often fails because of stark cultural differences. Ib Löfgrén, Lars Fæste, Tuukka Seppä et al., "Lessons from Eight Successful M&A Turnarounds," *bcg.com* 12/11/2018 [online] <https://www.bcg.com/en-gb/publications/2018/lessons-from-eight-successful-mergers-acquisitions-turnarounds.aspx> [accessed 27/02/2019]. See also: Steve Blank, "Why Corporate Skunk Works Need to Die," *forbes.com* 10/11/2014 [online] <https://www.forbes.com/sites/steveblank/2014/11/10/why-corporate-skunk-works-need-to-die/#fbeb84b37925> [accessed 28/02/2019].

> *… il est bon de se souvenir que vous devez aux clients, ainsi qu'à votre employeur, un engagement sans réserve* (Coppey's italics)
>
> [*… it's good to recall you owe your clients, as well as your employer, an unqualified commitment*].[29]

Chanard is independently minded, vocationally committed and does not see himself as part of a class which shares a common struggle. He is among the highest paid and most commercially valuable workers in the organisation. He is primarily driven by the need to learn, expand his mental capabilities, as well as to invent and collaborate with like-minded individuals, wherever they are located – not immediately by money or job security.[30]

During his Paris office induction tour, Chanard's new manager, Marwani, introduces him to the staff restaurant where he is sold a quasi-celestial dining experience:

> … il y a régulièrement des animations thématiques. En ce moment un décor Caraïbes, une musique chaloupée annonçant les prochaines vacances d'été, et le chef compose un menu en harmonie.
>
> [… there are regular themed events. Just now, a Caribbean decor, lively music announcing the forthcoming summer holidays, and the chef is devising a supporting menu in harmony].[31]

Chanard is, therefore, induced to consider lunch as a divine interval where he can still think about work, rather than bolt down a sandwich at his desk. Other incentives include 'concierge services' that help knowledge workers dispense with needs to carry out workaday chores, such as laundry, while reducing everyday psychological stress and promoting physical health through The Wellness Centre:

> autrement dit, une salle de sport remarquablement équipée.
>
> [in other words, a remarkably equipped sports centre].

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[29] Coppey, *Potentiel* (2013), pp. 20–21.

[30] Abraham Maslow, *The Theory of Human Motivation* (Radford, VA: Wilder Publications, 2013) Originally published 1943.

[31] Coppey, *Potentiel* (2013), p. 17.

The facilities here incorporate baths, saunas and massage beds.[32]

As time is seen as their most limited resource, all these 'benefits' explicitly exist to promote individual 'wellness' and, paradoxically, free individuals to spend more hours on work.[33]

These activities profit organisations but can lead to individual stress because they encourage workers to accept more psychological pressure to promote their own and organisational success, while ignoring personal and family welfare. This is precisely what happens to Chanard during the course of the novel as he repeatedly prioritises work over his family responsibilities.

Chanard's experience also reflects sociologist Edgar Morin's argument that it is within human nature to want to succeed, even if this causes suffering to ourselves:

> … ce qui caractérise *sapiens*, ce n'est pas une réduction de l'affectivité au profit de l'intelligence, mais au contraire une véritable éruption psychologique affective, et même le surgissement de l'*ubris*, c.à.d. la démesure.
>
> […what characterises sapiens is not a reduction of their ability to sense emotion to the benefit of intelligence, but on the contrary, a real outpouring of psychological emotion, and even the emergence of hubris, i.e. excess].[34]

Chanard, as an ambitious high-flier, quickly recognises that he must innovate if he is to continue to prosper. This is what the organisation

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32 Coppey, *Potentiel* (2013), p. 87.

33 Neil Kokemuller, "Residential Concierge Duties," *chron.com* [online] <https://work.chron.com/residential-concierge-duties-21275.html> [accessed 26/01/2019]. An entire industry has developed around the notion of 'wellness'. For instance, as at 31/08/2017, Sodexo, a privately-owned French food services and facilities management company, had 427,000 employees in eighty countries. One of its current objectives, as expressed in its *Rapport Intégré* for 2016–2017 is to 'Améliorer la qualité de vie de nos collaborateurs' (p. 29). It is currently funding a four-year research project at the University of Harvard in the US 'à identifier de nouvelles approches pour la santé et la sécurité au travail des employés *front-line*' (p. 33) *Rapport Intégré Extrait du document de référence 2016–2017* [online] <http://www.sodexo.com/files/live/sites/sdxcom-global/files/PDF/Finance/20171218_Sodexo-Rapport-Integre-2016–2017_FR.pdf> [accessed 10/01/2018].

34 Edgar Morin, *Le paradigme perdu: la nature humaine* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2016), pp. 121–122.

expects and, more importantly, what he expects of himself. He becomes a workaholic refusing to take annual leave. Then, when he eventually takes a family holiday, he insists on taking work along. It hijacks his every waking moment and periodically casts a shadow over his marriage.[35]

Valerie Brunel describes how the working world has integrated personal development practices, such as career management, into a strategy to exercise psychological and moral power and promote individualisation of the employment relationship.[36] This creates a narrow definition of what it is to be human because the continuing prioritisation of work can separate workers from colleagues, families and friends. We can see this throughout *Potentiel du sinistre*, as reflected in Chanard's relationships with his wife and his colleague, Vautier. Omar Aktouf and W. David Holford echo Linhart's views that the end result of so-called 'sur-humanisation' under neoliberalism is the creation of 'les bonnes vieilles recettes tayloriennes' when they assert:

> [This] is a truncated human being reduced to his functional dimension: dehumanised, instrumentalised, and reified.[37]

Coppey's novel also illustrates how the blurring of work and domestic activities occurs when both Chanard and Céline import business thinking into their family life to streamline their young daughter's education:

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35 Coppey, *Potentiel* (2013), pp. 36–37.

36 Valérie Brunel, *Les managers de l'âme: Le développement personnel en entreprise, nouvelle pratique de pouvoir?* (Paris: La Découverte, 2008).

37 Omar Aktouf and W. David Holford, "The Implications for Humanism in Business Studies," in *Humanism in Business*, ed. Heiko Spitzeck (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 103. See also: Danièle Linhart, D'où vient la souffrance des salariés du XXIe siècle ? Ruptures et continuités entre management moderne et logique taylorienne, *Les Possibles*, No. 14 Été 2017, 6–13 19/09/2017 [online] <https://france.attac.org/pdf/possibles/708> [accessed 25/05/2018]. It should also be noted that the US psychologist, Frederick Hertzberg, warned managers forty years ago about the limitation of control and performance processes. Writing in 1980, he stated that it was simplistic to require managers and employees to imitate the behaviour of 'termites'. Frederick Herzberg Humanities: Practical Management Education in *Industry Week* 206, no. 7 (1980): pp. 69–72.

> Afin de concentrer les efforts sur une seule exigeante et laisser de côté tout ce qui ne réserve qu'incertitudes et temps perdu, la musique est éliminée.
>
> [Music is eliminated so she can focus her efforts on just one demanding task and leave aside all that is uncertain and time consuming.][38]

As Chanard works on developing ideas for a new product, his mental distinctions between work and home life evaporate. He even asks his young daughter to propose ideas because:

> Dans leur grande innocence et leur infinie liberté, sait-on jamais quelles inventions les enfants portent en eux ?
>
> [In their great innocence and with their endless sense of freedom, do we ever know what inventions children carry in their heads ?][39]

Chanard spends long hours working because he has been made to believe that self-sacrifice will contribute to some greater moral outcome. This may be considered self-inflicted psychological violence. As psychologist Christophe Dejours puts it:

> normalité n'implique donc pas l'absence de souffrance, bien au contraire.
>
> [normality does not therefore imply absence of suffering, but quite the opposite].[40]

As previously noted with respect to routinised jobs, psychological control can corrode the independence of individual thought and modifies behaviour. This is consistent with Michel Foucault's argument that society as a whole is designed around the need for enforcers to find ways to exercise power and exert punishment that are universal, cost-effective and proportionate.[41]

At the same time, the bullied worker has no sense of certainty about their situation:

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[38] Coppey, *Potentiel* (2013), p. 110.

[39] Coppey, *Potentiel* (2013), p. 61.

[40] Christophe Dejours, *Souffrance en France: La banalisation de l'injustice sociale* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1998), p. 43.

[41] Foucault, *Surveiller et punir* (1975), p. 93.

> Aucun ordre ne garantissait rien, ni ne protégeait personne. Aucun agencement ne demeurait fixe, stable, protecteur. Aucune obéissance. Tout mouvait et se récompensait. Tout s'altérait, bougeait, se reconfigurait.
>
> [No order guaranteed anything, nor protected anyone. No arrangement stayed fixed, stable, protected. No sense of obedience. Everything moved and was readjusted. Everything altered, changed, reconfigured itself.][42]

As the previous analysis has sought to illustrate, neoliberalism uses psychological control systems and processes to instil a culture that keeps workers in their place in the organisational hierarchy. This is exactly what happens in *Potentiel du sinistre* when, following his appointment as a manager, Chanard is ordered to reduce the size of his team but his choice of a leaver is subsequently countermanded by his own superiors.[43] This appears to run counter to Moulier Boutang's assertion that in 'cognitive capitalism' some employees, including those in management positions, believe that work structures have given them liberty to act freely, as part of the knowledge worker's remit to promote creativity.[44] For Chanard, however, such freedom does not extend to control over his available human resources.

This novel also explores the inherently imprecise relationship between performance measurement and knowledge work, discussed in general terms earlier. In this instance, Chanard needs to achieve 'measurable' objectives by introducing a novel insurance product designed to pay dividends based on the scale and frequency of natural disasters, many of which, by their very character, are unforeseen and uncontrollable. As de Gaulejac and Hanique argue, while working to rigid, universal standards is the norm in neoliberalism, it is not always possible to introduce because individuals sometimes have to behave paradoxically to:

> répondre à des exigences parfaitement incompatibles.
>
> [respond to completely incompatible requirements].[45]

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[42] Stéphanie Chaillou, *Alice ou le choix des armes* (Paris : Alma, 2016), p. 29.

[43] Coppey, *Potentiel* (2013), pp. 154–163.

[44] Moulier Boutang, *Cognitive* (2011), p. 89.

[45] De Gaulejac and Hanique, *op.cit.*, 2015, p. 15.

The contradiction for Chanard is that the organisation requires from him both standardised, measurable outputs, along with creativity and innovation to add business profit. These latter are individual human capabilities that neoliberal management seeks to regulate through standardisation. However, nurturing creative thinking is clearly important for commercial organisations that want to sustain success in sectors where constant product improvement is the key driver for commercial longevity. Some degree of personal liberty is therefore required. In practice, this approach can, therefore, be problematic.[46]

All Chanard's inputs and outputs are carefully assessed through a performance management process bringing together ambitious individual objectives he sets for himself in conjunction with line management. When promoted to manager, he must also ensure his team satisfies departmental Key Performance Indicators. His own individual performance process incorporates annual and interim reviews, plus 360° feedback from organisational superiors, peers and managers.[47] This is a complex, imperfect activity where scientific and mathematical principles, incorporating observation and scrutiny of qualitative evidence, are deliberately used by managers to make 'quantifiable' judgements that then determine scores, inevitably based in part on the evaluator's views of Chanard's personality and visible behaviour. This is a world away from the kind of assessments required for the 'material' workers discussed in Chapter 3 where jobs can be described in detail and, to a great extent, jobs outputs measured as units of production or as a service level. This is the case, for instance, with large-sample customer assessments of service satisfaction for supermarket till operators, where a touch-screen electronic display shows a row of faces with expressions ranging from miserable to delighted.[48]

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[46] According to novelist and former France Télécom human resources manager, Thierry Beinstingel, this company tried to introduce 'creativity' into its competency-based performance management system as part of a response to relax controls over worker behaviours. This followed the well-publicised wave of worker suicides in 2008–2009, already discussed earlier. However, HR soon abandoned this plan because of 'implementation difficulties'. After all, how can you measure an individual's level of creativity? What does it look like to be '100% creative' or 'moderately creative' and so forth? There is also the question of individual interpretation. One individual's understanding of '100% creative' is unlikely to be the same as another's. The logic is bewilderingly inconsistent, and the expectation creates another source of psychological pressure. Comments made during this author's interview with Thierry Beinstingel, Paris 18/09/2018. See also: Hayat Gazzane, Suicides à France Télécom: le rappel des faits, last updated 07/07/2016 at *figaro.fr* [online] <http://www.lefigaro.fr/societes/2016/07/07/20005-20160707ARTFIG00115-suicides-a-france-telecom-le-rappel-des-faits.php> [accessed 18/10/2018].

[47] Coppey, *op.cit.*, 2013, pp. 29, 47, 112–113.

Coppey counters neoliberalism's preoccupation with numbers with a cautionary quote from the social philosopher André Gorz, who argued:

> La mesure quantitative comme substitut du jugement de valeur rationnel confère la sécurité́ morale et le confort intellectuel suprême : le Bien devient mesurable et calculable; la décision et le jugement moraux peuvent découler de l'application d'un procédé de calcul objectif impersonnel de quantification et n'ont pas à être assumés dans l'angoisse et l'incertitude par le sujet.
>
> [Quantitative measurement as a substitute for rational value judgement confers moral securitý and supreme intellectual comfort: Good becomes measurable and calculable; moral decision and judgement can flow from the application of an impersonal objective calculated using a process of quantification and need not be viewed in anguish and uncertainty by the subject.][49]

Potentiel du sinistre is also laced throughout with Anglo-US business jargon, 'la novlangue', such as:

> Marwani, recruteur-manager … shoote un mail à la directrice des ressources humaines. Chanard a du potentiel. Il est smart et courtois. On va le staffer au plus vite et on verra à quel genre de performer on a affaire. Le manager dit bravo, nous augmentons notre Capital Humain.
>
> [Marwani, recruiter-manager … shoots off an email to the HR Director. Chanard has potential. He is smart and polite. We'll put him on the staff him as soon as possible

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[48] Olivier Netter, Nigel Hill, Satisfaction client: De la conquête à la fidélisation (Paris: Éditions Eska, 2000).

[49] André Gorz, *Métamorphoses du travail, quête du sens critique de la raison économique* (Paris: Éditions Galilée, 1998), p. 154 in Coppey, *op.cit.*, 2013, p. 112.

> and see what kind of performer we're dealing with. The manager says bravo, we are increasing our Human Capital.][50]

As discussed in Chapter 1, this type of linguistic degradation may be considered slapdash or, at the extreme, wilfully dishonest, because such usage can often hide dark intentions that the speaker may be reluctant to communicate with clarity.

Potentiel du sinistre reflects how knowledge creation operates in practice. Chanard's job, as a 'financial engineer' and designated high-flyer, is to create new products through an analysis of:

> l'information financière, économique et géopolitique susceptible d'impacter les marchés.
>
> [financial, economic and geopolitical information likely to impact markets].[51]

This relies extensively on complex financial modelling from which 'rational' judgements are made that are 'quantified' even though they may not be entirely 'quantifiable'. Thus, unlike a production environment, his is purely cerebral work where input (essentially reading and thought) cannot be measured except as time spent, while the commercial value of his outputs may not be understood as germane – either immediately or at any future date.

Chanard attends a training course where he is informed that 'la maîtrise de l'information' (information mastery) is essential for organisations to remain highly competitive.[52] He therefore focuses on gathering market intelligence to identify an innovative financial services product by examining masses of metadata to determine as yet unseen trends. Coppey describes in detail Chanard's search to develop this ground-breaking product to encourage insurers and reinsurers to invest in insurance policies that pay out only in the event of a major natural disaster.[53]

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[50] Agnes Vandevelde-Rougale (preface Giles Hereros) *La novlangue managériale* (Erès, 2017), p. 20 [online] <http://excerpts.numilog.com/books/9782749253718.pdf> [accessed 19/03/2018]. See also: George Orwell, *1984* (London: Harvill Secker, 1949).

[51] Coppey, *op.cit.*, 2013, p. 16.

[52] Coppey, *op.cit.*, 2013, p. 53.

While Chanard takes up this challenge with gusto, Coppey juxtaposes this effort with examples, peppered throughout the novel, of small, unpredictable and unexpected incidents, to demonstrate that the nature and consequence of risk is sometimes unknown and simply cannot be quantified. For instance, a party guest accidentally collides with a TV set that is smashed; while an inebriated Chanard stumbles over a blossoming pine tree root, falls asleep outside and is sunburnt.[54]

Chanard's ideas about the new product gradually mature into so-called 'Catastrophe' or 'Cat-Bonds' which he successfully promotes to senior executives at the organisation's Boston head office. By any measure this is a form of gambling because chance and risk play a large part. However, it is striking that neither Chanard nor senior management see this as a morally dubious initiative. On the other hand, the reader, through Chanard's colleague, Vautier, understands that this is, in effect, wagering on the misery of others, especially when Vautier:

> … demande s'il doit recruter un directeur de casino comme consultant, personne ne rit.
>
> […asks if he should recruit a casino director as a consultant, no-one laughs].[55]

Coppey is hazy on some of the technical detail here but the idea has sufficient flesh to remain credible. Essentially, insurers set aside capital into a special account which pays out substantial sums to reinsurers if a natural disaster occurs. Chanard's organisation appears to make money from investing in and managing the scheme.

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[53] Control of the climate has long been a subject for the human imagination. There are some solid literary examples here, including Prospero's deranged attempts to control the weather in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. William Shakespeare, *The Tempest* (London: Debrett, 1789, first printing) first performed 1610–1611.

[54] Coppey, *op.cit.*, 2013, pp. 42–43.

[55] Coppey, *op.cit.*, 2013, p. 82.

Chanard sees this as a 'win–win' for all parties because, with a diverse portfolio of such investments, it is unlikely that all disasters will occur simultaneously. Therefore:

> … le risk est à peu près nul.
>
> […the risk is almost zero].[56]

Given the organisation's confidence in the product's success, Chanard is lauded, promoted to research and development manager above his longer-serving colleague, Préville, and 'asked' to cancel his family winter holiday at short notice, despite Cécile's expected opposition.[57] Vautier, on the other hand, is roundly criticised by senior management for daring to suggest that 'Cat-Bonds' are a form of gaming.

Coppey paints the business world as a predominantly male preserve. Chanard's wife, Cécile, is faced with demotion on her return to a marketing role at another business, following maternity leave. She then quits and devotes her time instead to raising their daughter, Capucine.[58] Meanwhile, the head receptionist at Chanard's office, Linda, is ridiculed despite her efficiency by her male colleagues as:

> Vieille fille sans charme évident … un élément de folklore sans pareil, une source de conversations relaxantes depuis qu'elle a pris l'habitude de donner en spectacle ses crise de nerfs …
>
> [An old girl with no particular charm … an unparalleled part of company folklore, a source of relaxing conversation with her habit of putting on a show about her nervous breakdowns …].[59]

In Coppey's novel, Vautier is targeted by senior management who try to ostracise him, much in the way that Foucault argues regarding social use of shaming and ridicule. They counsel Chanard to keep him at a 'distance raisonnable' because of his open criticism of management's lack of ethical backbone regarding promotion of 'Cat-Bonds' – although paradoxically Vautier remains supportive of their creator, Chanard.[60]

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[56] Coppey, *op.cit.*, 2013, pp. 80–86.
[57] Coppey, *op.cit.*, 2013, p. 102.
[58] Coppey, *op.cit.*, 2013, p. 25.
[59] Coppey, *op.cit.*, 2013, p. 19.

As he gradually becomes aware of the morally dubious nature of profiteering from the misery of others, Chanard increasingly punishes himself for performance failures. Ultimately, he himself feels shame, guilt, isolation and self-doubt.[61]

In *Potentiel du sinistre*, Vautier's isolation and the subsequent pressure on Chanard create individual suffering perceived by senior management as 'une vulnérabilité psychologique', a sign, in particular, of Chanard's alleged individual mental fragility, best addressed through psychological support, rather than through changes in organisational processes.[62] This belief that management is always right reflects Hirigoyen's view that, as a social group, senior management relies heavily on its own sense of superiority and self-importance to succeed.[63]

Chanard only gradually recognises that his current position at work is unsustainable. There is no single eureka moment. In seeking to understand the choices he has made and why he has made them, he struggles between his preference to be rational in all things, an increasing sense of emotional unease, and the realisation that self and organisational interest are not always identical.[64] Bourdieu's theoretical concepts on symbolic violence are directly applicable here. They demonstrate how organisations, as collections of individuals, continually do battle to dominate and retain power over others in subtle ways that coerce workers to represent the organisation, while these individuals themselves seek to retain their identities by exercising some freedom of choice. This is the essence of Chanard's dynamic struggle. His individual sense of self increasingly opposes his contractual responsibilities to the organisation and its expectations of him which, paradoxically, he has set for himself.

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[60] Coppey, *op.cit.*, 2013, pp. 45 and 103.

[61] Coppey, *op.cit.*, 2013, p. 203.

[62] de Gaulejac, *op.cit.*, 2009, p. 14.

[63] Marie-France Hirigoyen, *Le harcèlement moral: La violence perverse au quotidien* (Paris: La Découverte, 2003).

[64] Alex Callinicos, *Making History: Agency, Structure and Change in Social Theory* (Leiden/Boston, MA: Brill, 2004).

As Coppey's novel progresses, sales of 'Cat-Bonds' prove disappointing. Investors are reluctant to exploit the grave misfortunes of others. They recognise, for instance, that, even if environmental disasters may be dramatically larger in the tropics, smaller calamities in Europe, where population density is much higher, are likely to have a deeper social and economic impact. Worried about his job, Chanard becomes disconsolate and irritable and urges an equally concerned Cécile to consider lifestyle alternatives. As for their now 6-year-old daughter, Capuchine, who is clearly wise beyond her years:

> Elle ne comprend pas comment il est possible de prévoir le temps qu'il fera demain, et pas celui qu'il fera l'année prochaine.
>
> [She doesn't understand how it's possible to forecast tomorrow's weather and not next year's.][65]

Chanard grows increasingly disenchanted with his work, especially when senior management countermands his decision not to dismiss Vautier as part of a cost-cutting exercise. He believes Vautier has been misjudged. Isolated and depressed, Chanard takes to hiding in the men's toilets and behaves manically at work and at home.[66] Revisiting the organisation's Code of Conduct, first read on recruitment, he no longer sees a statement of vision and values, but a crude behavioural control process:

> Avertissements; mises à l'essai: sans soldes: rétrogradations; réductions de salaire; résiliation de contrat; réparations; poursuites judiciaires.
>
> [Warnings; probation: without pay; demotions; salary cuts; contract termination; compensation; legal proceedings.][67]

Uncharacteristically late, he runs to a meeting, deliberately hits an oncoming cyclist in the face with his attaché case, then pushes ahead of other pedestrians at a crossing while the traffic lights are turning red.[68]

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[65] Coppey, *op.cit.*, 2013, p. 135.

[66] Coppey, *op.cit.*, 2013, pp. 168 and 177.

[67] Coppey, *op.cit.*, 2013, p. 172.

[68] Coppey, *op.cit.*, 2013, p. 179.

Subsequently, he meets a potential customer interested in buying 'Cat-Bonds' who, like Vautier, questions their underlying philosophy:

> Spéculer sur une tornade ou un tremblement de terre, je trouve ça encore meilleur que de parier sur la faillite d'une entreprise ou la dette d'un État.
>
> [Speculating on a tornado or an earthquake is even better than betting on corporate bankruptcy or state debt.][69]

Increasingly angst-ridden, he begins reading philosophy books openly in the office and visits a Protestant pastor who advises him that God will not necessarily provide him with the answers he is seeking.[70] One of Chanard's team informs on his reading habits to the branch director who tells him threateningly that:

> Si vous obtenez le bien de votre personne au détriment de celui du Groupe, nous trouvons en situation de désaccord … notre patience n'est pas sans fin.
>
> [If you benefit at the expense of the Group, we will find ourselves at odds … our patience is not endless][71]

Eventually, the organisation forces him to take sick leave and he refers himself to a psychiatrist, to whom he explains:

> Je n'ai pas de faim, pas de désir sexuel, sauf par accès imaginaires ne mettant pas en scène Cécile.
>
> [I'm not hungry, there's no sex drive, except for imaginary urges not involving Cecile].[72]

Finally, without consulting Cécile, he checks himself into a health retreat where he feels comfortable. Ironically, this is run on strict neoliberal business lines:

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[69] Coppey, *op.cit.*, 2013, p. 182.

[70] Coppey, *op.cit.*, 2013, pp. 185–191.

[71] Coppey, *op.cit.*, 2013, p. 191.

[72] Coppey, *op.cit.*, 2013, p. 211.

> Le Dépression Manager est éloquent. Il énumère des valeurs: Performance, Transparence, Courtoisie, Engagement, Éthique, Humanité. Notre mission est de procurer le bien-être à ceux qui nous fait confiance.
>
> [The Depression Manager speaks eloquently. He lists values: Performance, Transparency, Courtesy, Commitment, Ethics, Humanity. Our mission is to provide well-being to those who place their confidence in us.][73]

He is burnt out and blames himself for failing continually to satisfy organisational standards.

His mental state is reflected in Cederström and Fleming's observation that psychological control in modern organisations renders individual workers in a state of:

> Somatic desolation … grounded in a kind of hyper-hopelessness.[74]

There are echoes here too of Cathy Caruth's application of Sigmund Freud's trauma theory to literature when she asserts that:

> trauma seems to me to be much more than a pathology, or the simple illness of a wounded psyche: it is always the story of a wound that cries out, that addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available.[75]

This reasoning is illustrated by Chanard's mental state at the end of the novel. Equally, the notion is mirrored in studies on mental torment among severely depressed workers that demonstrate how extreme measures by workers, up to and including suicide, can provide an escape route.

Dejours and Gernet distinguish two sets of factors that can trigger workplace suffering: the working environment and the organisation of work, including how managers and subordinates communicate and behave with one another.

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73 Coppey, *op.cit.*, 2013, p. 215.

74 Carl Cederström and Peter Fleming, *Dead Man Working* (Winchester: Zero Books, 2012), p. 2.

75 Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 2016), p. 4.

They reference a study that concluded 11 per cent of France's active population is likely to suffer from work-related depression at any time, rising to 24 per cent for those workers whose jobs are at risk or are unemployed. Those in managerial and technical roles that prioritise use of the intellect are less likely to become depressed than others, while such depression manifests itself in feelings of guilt, loss of self-worth, job interest, concentration and appetite, tiredness and sleeping difficulties.[76]

Bourdieu argues that, the more individual employees invest subjectively in their work, the more productive they will be. However, he also contends that this may become an illusion, a form of self-exploitation that is supported by management techniques associated, for instance, with ideas about autonomy and personal development.[77] This is precisely what happens to Chanard in *Potentiel du sinistre*. These ideas also reflect those of Cederström and Spicer outlined earlier.

Writing some twenty years after Bourdieu, Clot and Gollac contend that the most effective way to reduce worker suffering is:

> à développer des formes démocratiques dans la vie de travail.
>
> [to develop democratic forms in working life].[78]

This involves giving employees opportunities to work in an environment where they have greater autonomy and therefore gain increased meaning in their work. The danger, as evidenced by this novel, is that while this approach may work initially, it can easily develop into yet another management technique or initiative deployed to ensure that only workers change their attitudes and behaviours, while the neoliberal organisation continues to apply pressure as it has done previously. Clot and Gollac provide some solid examples which support how this approach can work, including one involving automobile industry sub-contracting.[79] However, given the history of such initiatives, their ultimate benefit for workers seems open to question. For instance, Francophone specialist Jeremy Lane argues, in his examination of the post-Fordist workplace, as reflected in recent French theory and literature, that:

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[76] Dejours and Gernet, *op.cit.*, 2016, p. 81.

[77] Pierre Bourdieu, La double vérité du travail, *Méditations pascaliennes* (Paris : Seuil, 1997), p. 244.

[78] Clot and Gollac, *Le travail* (2017), p. 205.

[79] Clot and Gollac, *Le travail* (2017), p. 208.

> … the dominant experience of affective, cognitive, and immaterial labour, far from being one of creative cooperation, is one of disaffection and refusal.[80]

These attitudes are ultimately reflected by both Chanard and Vautier in the novel.

It seems credible that managers, particularly those in publicly quoted organisations, are fully aware of pressures from shareholders for quick investment returns. This perspective runs counter to any sustained desire genuinely to engage workers in a debate because this would not be consistent with neoliberalism, which puts profit maximisation first. Of course, initiatives to improve employee involvement in organisations, including through job enrichment and enlargement, have been around for over half a century.[81] However, if they work so well, one might question why they have not been adopted as standard organisational operating practice, particularly in France – the geographical focus of this study. The answer is likely to be that they do not provide the quick-fix solutions required by shareholders. Instead they demand a sustained cultural shift, supported by legislation and subsequent enforcement. According to clinical psychologist Philippe Baron, only the intervention of labour inspectors, occupational physicians and the courts will compel organisations to address issues related to workplace suffering.[82]

In any event, a commitment to cultural change demands sustained and co-ordinated commitment from all interest groups; but this is not the way that modern business works. Management operates on the basis of short-term initiatives, that is, on the belief that 'change' is a project, not a sustained way of 'being'.[83] This means that as soon as a particular, highly laudable project to encourage greater employee engagement is introduced, management attention inevitably shifts elsewhere to the next initiative. Furthermore, there are invariably external pressures, such as stock market falls and changes in competition, that compel managers to revert to a 'telling' mentality rather than actively to engage and motivate workers. If this cycle is repeated over time, as one suspects it must have been in many organisations over the last forty years, then most employees will similarly adopt a short-term view of their work along with an innate distrust of management, limited loyalty and desire for quick rewards.

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[80] Jeremy F. Lane, "Disaffection in the Post-Fordist Workplace: Figurations of 'Immaterial Labour'," *Recent French Theory and Literature Modern & Contemporary France* 19, no. 4 (November 2011): pp. 495–509.

[81] See, for instance, Eric Rhenman, *Industrial Democracy & Industrial Management (Technology & Democratic Society)* (London: Tavistock, 1968).

[82] Philippe Baron, Que peut la loi face à la souffrance au travail? *Annales Médico-psychologiques, revue psychiatrique*, Vol. 174 (7), September 2016, pp. 580–583 [online] <https://0-www-sciencedirect-com.wam.leeds.ac.uk/science/article/pii/S0003448716300592?via%3Dihub> [accessed 23/01/2018].

Violence des Échanges en milieu tempéré

This film echoes many of the issues raised in Coppey's novel. It deals with the initiation into employment and early career of an apprentice knowledge worker, Philippe – a young graduate, recruited into one of neoliberalism's front-line support organisations, McGregor, a global management consultancy. Director Jean-Marc Moutout's study is not a nuanced one. It is that management consulting is a heinous occupation, with its above-market-average rewards, long hours, absences from home and dispassionate examination of client organisations that often leads to dramatic job losses and potentially questionable ethical behaviour – from both client organisation managers and consultants. Management consulting, Moutout argues, is also fundamentally incompatible with a balanced life built on a strong, honest, loving personal relationship, in this instance that of Philippe and his lover, Éva. Whether or not Moutout is suggesting that these contradictory elements and moral ambiguities can ultimately be reconciled remains an open question, although some kind of personal accommodation can be inferred from the last two scenes of the film. In the first of these, Philippe's boss, Hugo, urges him to dance with his wife at a formal McGregor dinner because he doesn't himself dance. Philippe agrees and Hugo's wife rises silently and elegantly from her seat as if, commanded like a mere commodity, a trophy wife, she automatically bends to her husband's will. Secondly, in what is the film's final scene, the camera reveals Philippe looking happy as he holds hands with a new love. They walk down a beach and go for a swim.[84]

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[83] Barber Griffith-Cooper and Karyl King, "The Partnership between Project Management and Organizational Change: Integrating Change Management with Change Leadership," *Performance Improvement* 46, no. 1 (January 2007): pp. 14–20 [online] <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1002/pfi.034> [accessed 11/05/2020].

The plot of the film is straightforward. Philippe encounters Éva on a Paris Metro train during the morning rush hour and he shouts across a crowded carriage at another passenger to stop sexually harassing her. They only really meet the next morning as they bump into one another at a Metro exit in the Parisian business district of La Défense. Philippe has just started work as a trainee consultant at McGregor Consulting while Éva is working on an interim contract nearby as a receptionist. Her employment and lifestyle are precarious while Philippe's offer a degree of security.[85] He is the only person she knows who is employed on an open-ended contract, a clear reflection of the current state of the French economy.[86]

As their relationship grows, Philippe is assigned to work with top selling consultant Hugo, on what is effectively a cost-reduction exercise for a production company – Jansen Metal Industries, a bustling sheet aluminium stamping factory which, among other things, produces drinks cans. When Philippe discovers that Hugo is proposing to tell client senior management that a 30 per cent headcount reduction, representing eighty jobs, is needed for the organisation to survive, he is overcome with moral angst, then informs Éva, who declares it is his duty to tell the workforce.[87] When he then informs Hugo about his worries, at first Hugo laughs, then he tells him to just get on with his job because, Hugo asserts, without their involvement the company would be a lot worse off and probably have to close down. Éva gives Philippe an ultimatum: tell the workforce or our relationship is over. After a brief psychological struggle, he chooses consulting.[88]

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[84] Moutout, *Violence*, 2004, 1h31m.

[85] Sonia McKay, Steve Jefferys, Anna Paraksevopoulou, Étude sur le travail précaire et les droits sociaux réalisée pour la Commission européenne (VT/2010/084), Working Lives Research Institute, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, London Metropolitan University, 2012, [online*] etudier.com* [accessed 08/10/2019] <https://www.etudier.com/dissertations/Study-Precarious-Work-Executive-Summary-Fr/72820405.html>.

[86] Marie-Madeleine Sève, CDD:Des chiffres explosifs, 08/07/2019. *l'express-l'entreprise* [online] <https://lentreprise.lexpress.fr/rh-management/recrutement/cdd-des-chiffres-explosifs_2087447.html>.

Philippe has been assigned by Hugo to analyse Jansen's structures, processes and individual job roles. Hugo says he himself will focus externally on its market positioning. The psychological pressure on Philippe increases when Hugo tells him to evaluate the competencies of all Jansen staff so that management can then decide which ones to be selected for redundancy. He is shocked and says this should be an internal HR activity because this effectively makes him directly responsible for the dismissals, including those workers with whom he has socialised over previous weeks. Hugo insists this is Philippe's job, although the latter regards it as a betrayal of relationships recently made. Among other things, Philippe has struck up a friendship with Jansen's canteen supervisor who he meets one evening in a bar. Philippe interviews a partially disabled middle-aged man who routinely carries out unpaid over time and says work is important to him because it gives his life meaning. He also encounters a single mother with two young children. The handheld camera examines her face in close up as she explains the difficulties she has making ends meet. Philippe now sees these people as individuals he can relate to, not just anonymous workers to be selected for economic dismissal.

From the perspective of this study, this film is significant because the story takes the spectator deep inside the world of management consultancy where workers, rather than being one-dimensional enforcers, are also seen as the targets of systemic psychological violence. Philippe understands that should he fail to perform according to McGregor's standards, he will himself be dismissed. He understands too that an open-ended contract does not provide job security. Except for its notice requirement, this type of contract has little more security to offer than a fixed-term one. Indeed, McGregor would likely dispense with the requirement for Philippe to be given notice if he were found to have disclosed client confidential information, as he does here to Éva, because this could be potential grounds for gross misconduct and summary dismissal. In addition, job loss in such circumstances would bring with it a spontaneous deterioration of Philippe's lifestyle and, undoubtedly, a negative employer's reference, affecting his entire consulting career. Such pressures also apply to Hugo who, as a married breadwinner with a family, has much more to lose if unable to ensure Philippe sticks to the work in hand by putting aside his moral scruples. This situation explains why Hugo ultimately becomes very angry with Philippe about the psychological dilemma he faces and, for good measure, adds that Philippe's resignation would, ultimately, only harm himself. Thus, Philippe finds himself squeezed between two sources of psychological pressure, one from Éva, the other from Hugo, both of whom represent unyielding positions.[89]

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[87] Moutout, *Violence*, 2004, 38m.

[88] Moutout, *Violence*, 2004, 37–38m.

As Matthias Kipping and Timothy Clark demonstrate, management consulting is not a product of neoliberalism but has evolved to become one of its integral components. It has its roots in experimental advisory work carried out in commercial organisations in the US in the early years of the twentieth century.[90] While as a sector it remains economically small, it has demonstrated a large influence based on its ability to recruit bright people and develop new products and services that respond to changing economic needs.

Consulting has grown faster than the economies of many Western nations, partly by expanding globally.[91] For instance, latest figures for France show that the 300 largest consulting firms employ more than 25,000 staff in total. There are, in addition, an estimated 20,000 consultants operating there independently.[92]

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[89] Moutout, *Violence*, 2004, 38m and 55m.

[90] Matthias Kipping and Timothy Clark, eds, *The Oxford Book of Management Consulting* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

[91] Kipping and Clark, *Management Consulting* (2012), Introduction, pp. 1–28.

[92] Henri Tcheng and Jean-Michel Huet, Les incessantes mutations des cabinets de conseil, *L'Expansion Management Review*, 2009.

Accusations of perceived moral duplicity of consultants are central to Moutout's film, as Philippe holds back the likely findings of McGregor's organisational review from workers and managers because his work is officially confidential. On the other hand, they can easily deduce the direction of his evolving conclusions from Philippe's methods of working, including openly questioning workers about possible process improvements and visibly using a stopwatch to carry out a time-and-motion exercise. So, this story clearly evidences those aspects of the neoliberal mindset that focus on the compilation and comparison of data to improve efficiency.

The lawyer Olivier Barbeau labels this type of overt questioning and monitoring as 'pratiques transgressive quotidiennes'. These enable consultants to progress debate within client organisations by sharing new ideas to help generate change, while enabling the real instigators, that is, the senior management team, to deny they were directly involved.[93]

Further, while Moutout appears to point the finger of culpability at Philippe and his boss, Hugo, rather than Jansen, it should be abundantly clear that consultants operate as advisors not decision-makers in client organisations. While the two consultants euphemistically call their work an 'audit', not an 'exercice de réduction des coûts', it seems somewhat naïve to think that they do so without management's collusion. When organisations introduce consultants to carry out such 'audits' it inevitably raises questions from workers from the outset, especially where no prior consultation has taken place with workers' representatives, as is the case here. The absence of such consultation serves Moutout's theme of management duplicity well. The vacuum created by an absence of dialogue between management and its workforce is inevitably filled with informal messaging between workers, including gossip and suspicion.[94]

The film also highlights the dark-side public relations aspects of consulting when, in one of its initial scenes, Hugo provides a masterclass in oleaginous presentation to Jansen's top management in which he criticises them, while demonstrating that they clearly need outside expert help. Visibly, Moutout has given Hugo the very appearance of evil. He has a dark suit, a knowing smile and a saturnine profile, as well as a neatly trimmed black goatee. He occasionally spouts American-style business jargon to persuade his audience that efficiency is not sufficient in today's competitive markets:

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[93] Olivier Barbeau, Les pratiques transgressive des consultants au service de la fabrique de la stratégie, *Revue française de gestion*, 2007/5, no. 174, pp. 43–59.

[94] Claude Didry, Les comités d'entreprise face aux licenciements collectifs: trois registres d'argumentation, *Revue française de sociologie* Vol. 39, No. 3 (July–– September 1998), pp. 495–534.

> Où les leaders d'aujourd'hui ne sont pas ceux de demain … notre objectif est de vous aider à améliorer votre performance et de vous donner les moyens de vous tirer le meilleur de vous-même pour parvenir à un progrès permanent.
>
> [Given that today's leaders are not tomorrow's … our goal is to help you improve your performance and empower you to get the best out of yourselves to achieve permanent progress.][95]

He presents himself as an omniscient management deity who understands the company's problems and can resolve them.

We also see that Philippe, at the start of his consulting career, is unable confidently to present himself to the world of business as an expert or a knowledge worker. When he begins interviewing administrative staff to carry out an analysis of each job, in his inexperience he misses an opportunity to ask a female administrative worker her opinion about a particular part of the product delivery process that she knows in detail and that regularly goes awry.[96] However, Hugo, who is literally peering coercively over Philippe's shoulder, follows swiftly through and assertively gazes down at the seated interviewee demanding to know what she thinks. He then provides Philippe with a short, somewhat menacing, lecture on how to get the best from such interviews in future:

> Jamais détourner les yeux. Jamais. Détourner les yeux ça te dit que tu doutes. Tu doutes ? … Ta compétence à toi c'est d'obtenir les infos obtiendras jamais tes objectifs … sur le terrain le seul critère c'est l'efficacité.

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[95] Moutout, *Violence*, 2004, 11m25s–12m9s.

[96] Moutout, *Violence*, 2004, 19m30s.

> [Never avert your eyes. Never. Averting your eyes tells you that you have doubts. You have doubts? … Your skill is to get the information, never give away your objectives … in the field the only criterion is efficiency.][97]

Philippe adopts Hugo's punchy style in his subsequent questioning of a shop floor worker and the company's production manager.[98]

It could be argued that many consultants are not fully-fledged knowledge workers in the sense that they actually create new products and services or, as Chanard does in Coppey's novel, promote innovate ways of thinking. Philippe and many of his colleagues might like to think they have or will become experts, but it is probable that McGregor is recruiting highly educationally accredited individuals – he was one of six starting on the same day – who will successfully deliver a limited range of standardised services, under a draconian policy where failure to continue to secure and deliver profitable projects will inevitably lead consultants to be 'let go'.[99] So when Philippe opts to place a career in consulting above his relationship with Éva, he is rejecting someone and something he knows, trusts and (in his way) loves in favour of a career in consulting where pressure to perform and comply can only become more intense, while failure to perform is likely to be dealt with dispassionately and swiftly.

Moreover, consultants may sometimes find that, for all their declared intellectual rigour and expertise, they are used by client senior management to propose solutions which management are fully aware of beforehand but need the avowed independence and expertise of external consultants to put on the table. Arguably, organisations count on management consultants to handle thorny problems caused by market changes and their own lack of capability. They sometimes want someone else to blame if the results of any study show their decisions in a negative light.[100] It is the role of the consultant, as much a prisoner of neoliberalism as any worker elsewhere, to absorb any dislike, suspicion, hatred and criticism cast in their direction because they are effectively compensated, within the neoliberal paradigm, by a financial premium set by the market. They are no more complicit than client management and shareholders who want to keep their hands clean. In this particular story, it seems reasonable to conclude that Jansen management is responsible for both the problems faced by its workers and their disillusionment with McGregor. As regards this latter, Philippe's activities are viewed with increasing suspicion by workers, while even members of Jansen's senior management team begin to be protective of their own areas and put pressure on one another. There is, for instance, a dispute between the sales and production managers over Jansen's ability to deliver a large order at short notice.[101]

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[97] Moutout, *op.cit.*, 2004, 20–21m.

[98] Moutout, *op.cit.*, 2004, 27m.

[99] Yves André Perez, La littérature sur l'intervention de conseil dans les organisations, *La revue des sciences de gestion*, 2006/3 no. 219, pp. 151–158 [online] <https://www.cairn.info/revue-des-sciences-de-gestion-2006-3-page-151.htm> [accessed 12/03/2018].

[100] Matthew Semadeni and Ryan Krause, "Hired to Be Fired? Exploring Top Management Team Use of Consultants as Professional Scapegoats," *Academy of*

Tensions pull in various directions. Suzanne, Jansen's HR manager, who has seen Philippe at work on the shop floor, tells him she knows exactly what he is doing and remarks:

> C'est tout un art de dissimilé la fatalité.
>
> [It's quite an art to conceal what you're really doing.][102]

In due course, after many late nights in his hotel room, Philippe submits his report to Hugo, and they conclude that the best solution for the client is to close all but its core operations, where Jansen knows there is a strong demand, even though other parts of the business are still making money after a decline in sales. As Hugo explains:

> Avec une baisse des coûts de 15 à 20%, plus les économies d'échelle, c'est la solution la plus rentable. Donc, la seule.
>
> [With cost reductions of 15 to 20%, plus economies of scale, it's the most profitable solution. In fact, it's the only one.][103]

Management 2011 Annual Meeting – West Meets East: Enlightening. Balancing. Transcending, AOM 2011. Academy of Management [online] <https://doi.org/10.5464/AMBPP.2011.144.a> [accessed 01/11/2019].

[101] Moutout, *op.cit.*, 2004, 28m.

[102] Moutout, *op.cit.*, 2004, 28m.

[103] Moutout, *op.cit.*, 2004, 35m.

Philippe gradually becomes besotted with work so that he psychologically represses any desire to be freed from neoliberalism. Both for Philippe and Hugo, despite the so-called freedom granted to knowledge workers by 'cognitive capitalism', the only real liberty they have is to resign and suffer subsequent loss of economic and social capital. McGregor does not allow for any internal challenge from its workers.[104] Its slogan 'work hard, play hard' sums up its approach to a world where it expects long hours, loyalty and obedience to its core values of efficiency, standardisation and control. There is no room for emotion or self-questioning. In return, its workers enjoy all the trappings of an economically comfortable lifestyle.

As the film draws to a close, Philippe returns to his hotel one evening to find Éva in his room. They make love and it seems that their relationship has been rekindled.[105] However, when Philippe subsequently invites Éva to join him to look for a spacious new apartment, it is evident to her that, while he considers this apartment is for her as well as her young daughter and Éva's mother who currently lives with them, he has assumed that, because he is paying for this rather plush accommodation, he plans to make all the decisions himself without her involvement. He doesn't even consider telling her the cost. Éva is furious and storms out.[106]

Later, at Jansen, Philippe has to enlist the support of its managing director to encourage the production manager to meet up with him so that they can determine the extent to which each worker on Philippe's draft redundancy selection list is actually multi-skilled. The production manager resents helping Philippe because he is protective of his staff. Meanwhile, we see Jansen's HR manager, who has been sickened at these developments, applying for a job elsewhere.[107]

Eventually, the managing director of Jansen announces its takeover to staff. He explains that this decision guarantees the organisation's future, but not their jobs. He then resigns, presumably with a substantial financial package, in favour of the sales manager.[108]

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[104] Moulier Boutang, *op.cit.*, 2001.
[105] Moutout, *op.cit.*, 2004, 1h3m.
[106] Moutout, *op.cit.*, 2004, 1h12m.
[107] Moutout, *op.cit.*, 2004, 1h11m.
[108] Moutout, *op.cit.*, 2004, 1h18m.

Subsequently, film spectators witness some of the direct psychological consequences of this decision. We see the HR manager begrudgingly welcoming the production manager, a long-term friend, into her home. She has been drinking heavily and breaks into tears. She explains that she has spent her life proud of her work and independence but now feels useless. She confesses to him that she has been complicit in not informing the union or workers in advance. She knew that workforce cuts were likely following the consultancy exercise but only now accepts that it is too late for the workforce to mobilise.[109]

Later, in a rousing speech at McGregor's annual formal dinner, its CEO addresses employees and their partners about their role in making McGregor such a success. He then encourages them all to chant loudly the McGregor slogan, 'work hard, play hard'. Moutout dispenses with any banners, flags, insignia or uniforms here but this call-to-arms is made to resemble a military rally. This type of event encourages organisational dominance over staff through the sheer power of a group experience in which all those present are encouraged to share. This may appear crass, but it does seem to feature habitually as part of many corporate team-building sessions.[110]

Finally, Moutout's film demonstrates how Philippe is inexorably drawn into the neoliberal world where his talents will be exploited. There is, however, a large question mark over the message Moutout wishes to leave the spectator. He seems to be arguing that the world of contemporary management consulting is without any redeeming features and that working in such an organisation (or being associated with it through marriage) is incompatible with self-fulfilment through mutual love. This seems debatable. Around 45 per cent of all marriages in France currently end in divorce. Choice of occupation is only one of many factors cited for their failure. Other factors include infidelity and egotism. Moreover, management consultancy as an occupation is nowhere near the top of the list.[111]

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[109] Moutout, *op.cit.*, 2004, 1h20m.

[110] Team Building: Unique Corporate Team Building Days that Are Built Around You, *andinspireme.com* [online] <https://www.andinspireme.com/inspire-your-team/team-building/?gclid=Cj0KCQjw9fntBRCGARIsAGjFq5ENldPHr0e29axZSV18ARBwJUxF1e6JW7swHqVCjXjxksS2YP_ChusaAjhhEALw_wcB> [accessed 03/11/209].

L'homme qui aimait trop travailler

Alexandre Lacroix's novel is a first-person narrative about Sommer, a self-centred middle-aged workaholic on his last day of existence before an unexpected fatal heart attack. In many ways, it provides a contrasting bookend to Philippe's career as a knowledge worker in Moutout's film analysed earlier. Sommer may be considered the veteran embodiment of what Moutout's young protagonist, Philippe, hopes to become – a committed corporate servant who has given up everything else for his job.

This novel contains detailed insights into the almost ceremonial nature of daily life of an individual who has willingly let himself be dominated by his intellectual work, and how his psychological intoxication with his job has stultified his ability to interact fully with others. Everything he does is to excess. He lives only for work, supported by strong coffee and keep-fit sessions. The novel provides a stream of consciousness chronicle, with many random and rambling thoughts that momentarily ignore the world of work, such as Sommer's reflection on how death from old age is handled as a magical event in parts of sub-Saharan Africa.[112]

All these mental peregrinations reveal an educated, intelligent individual struggling to escape from an invisible cage in which he appears happily to have locked himself. Further, the novel, as a whole, provides insights into how Sommer is subjected to systemic violence and how he contributes to it by his belligerent behaviour to others. By dedicating his life exclusively to work, Sommer has willingly transformed himself into an insensitive, anally retentive, manipulative bully who is loathed by most of his subordinates because of his lack of warmth, smugness and inability to socialise.

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[111] Combien de couples divorcent en France et pourquoi? *justiciable.com* [online] <https://www.jurifiable.com/conseil-juridique/droit-de-la-famille/divorce-france-statistiques> [accessed 08/10/2019].

[112] Lacroix, *op.cit.*, 2015, pp. 156–157.

Each weekday morning, he checks for any new emails on his mobile phone in the hope that something important might have arrived – although it never has. This is followed by strong coffee, a rigorous physical workout and fifteen minutes spent showering and preening, including applying:

> pas moins de sept produits parfumés.
>
> [no fewer than seven scented products].[113]

His evenings are also marked by routine. This solitary ritual includes drinking a complete bottle of wine in a period of just two hours. Yet, he does not believe he has a drink problem. In fact:

> Loin de diminuer ma puissance de travail, l'alcool l'a toujours, paradoxalement, décuplée, en m'incitant à me dépasser.
>
> [Far from reducing my power to work, alcohol has always, paradoxically, increased it tenfold, encouraging me to surpass myself.][114]

The novel provides an excellent analysis of the nature of immaterial labour.[115] Sommer is employed as a supply chain manager for a biscuit company. According to his own evaluation, he has an unsurpassed record of accurately understanding and predicting market movements. Rather grandiosely, he believes his is an important job because continued human existence depends on food always being readily available, and this can only be achieved through total mastery of supply chain management, which:

> permet de voir le monde tel qu'il est: un enchevêtrement de réseaux, dont dépend notre satisfaction quotidienne.
>
> [enables us to view the world as it is: a tangle of networks, on which our daily satisfaction depends].[116]

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[113] Lacroix, *op.cit.*, 2015, p. 17.

[114] Lacroix, *op.cit.*, 2015, pp. 11–13.

[115] Hardt and Negri, *op.cit.*, 2000.

[116] Lacroix, *op.cit.*, 2015, p. 48.

He emphasises that he is less interested in the nature of the products for which he is responsible than in changes in demand and supply of raw materials (including powdered egg and nougat), their storage, packaging materials, warehousing and shipping the finished product to point of sale.[117] His job is to eradicate shortages and gluts across the supply chain so as to maximise sales and minimise the cost of storing large amounts of biscuits in warehouses.

In line with the basic tenets of neoliberalism, Sommer strives to standardise all aspects of his work. He constantly draws up 'to-do lists' with estimated hours and minutes attached to each task, to help him carefully measure the time to be allocated to each item, including a lunch-time trip to the gym for a swim.[118] He recalls that his preoccupation with time stems from his school years when he developed a system of standard times for each task, such as twenty-five minutes for memorising a chapter in a history book, and eventually celebrating all time theoretically 'gained', not by relaxing, but by furiously cycling around the school neighbourhood on main roads.[119]

Convinced of his own mental and physical prowess, he sees himself as an orchestra conductor with a sixth sense:

> … je dois coordonner en temps réel le jeu de centaines de participants … si les flux ne sont saisissables qu'à travers des chiffres, des statistiques, des algorithmes … j'ai l'impression de les entendre, d'avoir développé une oreille spéciale pour ça …
>
> [… I have to coordinate in real time the interactions of hundreds of participants … if these flows can only be perceived through figures, statistics, algorithms … I've the impression of hearing them, of having developed a special ear for this work …][120]

Sommer adores 'multi-tasking', one of many Anglo-American business terms used throughout the novel, which he believes drives productivity and creativity by encouraging workers spontaneously to make connections between different ideas.[121] He remarks that he has at least four software applications perpetually open on his computer desktop and continually jumps back and forth between them to view and edit files while also engaging in:

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[117] Lacroix, *op.cit.*, 2015, p. 50.

[118] Lacroix, *op.cit.*, 2015, pp. 21–24, 44–45.

[119] Lacroix, *op.cit.*, 2015, p. 23.

[120] Lacroix, *op.cit.*, 2015, pp. 51–52.

[121] See for instance use of 'top down' and 'bottom up', Lacroix, *op.cit.*, 2015, p. 136.

> des petites diversions privées
>
> [small private distractions],

such as booking train tickets or a hotel room.[122] His detailed understanding of the figures, statistics and algorithms set out on the 'live' screen in front of him gives Sommer the impression that he can actually hear supply chain changes as they occur through his special sense of hearing. He believes that this level of sensitivity enables him intuitively to detect:

> Les ralentissements, les grippages, les bassins de rétention, les effusions irrationnelles …
>
> [Slowdowns, sudden, unexpected stoppages, stock reserves, over stocks …][123]

Sommer exists in an ocean of numbers which, when coupled with market intelligence, enable him and his team to analyse downward movements in sales well before they become trends and swiftly take into account, as appropriate, changes in competitor strategy.

He understands the power of language, and that the force of organisational discourse is most potent when delivered through the written word, rather than, say, a phone conversation. He detests such discussions because he can never hide what he really feels when he speaks directly and always wants to interrupt the other person. Moreover:

> Un mail est infiniment plus propre qu'une poignée de main. Un mail n'a pas d'haleine. Il est correctement orthographié et tourné, il ne laisse pas devenir votre humeur … [il] … vous défend comme un bouclier … [et] … il atteint directement le système nerveux de votre destinataire.
>
> [An e-mail is infinitely cleaner than a handshake. An email doesn't breathe. It is correctly spelled and communicated, it doesn't let your temper get in the way …

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[122] Lacroix, *op.cit.*, 2015, pp. 43–45.

[123] Lacroix, *op.cit.*, 2015, p. 52.

> [it] … protects you like a shield … [and] … it aims straight at the recipient's nervous system.][124]

He believes he has scientifically honed the use of email so that, when required, a message can generate the maximum suffering possible for the recipient. One of his tactics is to compel third parties effectively to become witnesses to each written admonishment he dispatches by copying them in. He believes that this shames the recipient more.

Sommer's lack of empathy, his intolerance of others and his absolute belief in his own superiority, are all reflected in his views about the public debate on workplace suffering in France. In particular, he is highly critical of journalists, and 'soi-disant' [so-called] experts, such as sociologists and occupational physicians whose professional training encourages them to detect discomfort and malignant symptoms everywhere. These include stress, back pain, psychosocial risks, bullying and burnout. However, as he sees it, they are simply making things worse by rehashing fashionable expressions.[125] Such external critics are like children who, by chance, come across adults having sex. Lack of life experience may convince these children that they are watching a brawl or some other form of violent physical contest. By contrast, these 'intellectuals' only see the negative side of work because they have no practical experience of the sheer joy that can come from it. Sommer's doctrine therefore reflects a strong belief in the core message of neoliberal people management, that is:

> La vérité, c'est que travailler est non seulement la clé de la construction de soi mais une source de plaisir inégalable, bien plus stable, surprenante, satisfaisante au quotidien que se peut offrir la sexualité, par exemple.
>
> [The truth is that work is not only the key to individual self-development, but a source of unparalleled pleasure, far more constant, surprising and satisfying on a daily basis than, for instance, what sex can offer.][126]

Sommer notes that he has long ago left behind his schoolboy desire to develop his artistic side and work using his hands. For Sommer, no matter how skilled a manual worker is, the solution to a problem can never be objectively perfect, unlike the immaterial worker who has to solve a mathematical challenge for which there can only be one answer.[127]

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[124] Lacroix, *op.cit.*, 2015, p. 25.

[125] Lacroix, *op.cit.*, 2015, p. 39.

[126] Lacroix, *op.cit.*, 2015, pp. 39–40.

Today, the thought of having hard, callused hands appalls him, and he is proud of his 'mains de bébé'. It should be noted that this attitude is in sharp contrast to that expressed by the protagonist in Thierry Beinstingel's novel, *Retour aux mots sauvages*, who, as a former electrical engineer, has been forced through redundancy, to work as a call-centre operator and associates his once rough hands, now turned soft and podgy, with high levels of skill.[128]

Sommer's boss, Raymond, says he is so impressed by Sommer's capability that he plans to transfer to him the supply management of the company's two worst-selling lines of biscuits, regarded by Sommer as 'deux cas désespérés' *[two hopeless cases]*.[129] He sees this action as an attempt by Raymond to put so much pressure on him that he will fail or quit. If this were true, he would never become Raymond's successor when he eventually retires. Raymond is aged about 60. This requirement to carry out extra work represents a clear example of psychological violence because Sommer already has a full workload. Should he refuse to pick up Raymond's challenge, he may put his reputation for technical mastery and finding solutions to complex problems at risk. Moreover, he knows that Raymond can always find other ways to place extreme demands on him or simply register negative remarks on his performance appraisal record. He concludes that Raymond knows he has no option but to say 'yes':

> J'ai pensé que les gardiens de prison qui votent à gauche devaient arborer le même genre de sourire en apportant les plateaux-repas.
>
> [I thought prison guards who vote for the left should sport the same sort of smile on their faces when they bring in meal trays.][130]

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[127] Lacroix, *op.cit.*, 2015, pp. 74–75.

[128] Thierry Beinstingel, *Retour aux mots sauvages* (Paris: Fayard/ Le livre de poche, 2010), p. 53.

[129] Lacroix, *op.cit.*, 2015, p. 55.

[130] Lacroix, *op.cit.*, 2015, p. 59.

Sommer promises himself that he will have revenge on Raymond at some point.[131] This is, however, not to be. A few hours later, Sommer lays dying on the office floor, and whispers to Raymond:

> … sans toi, je n'aurai jamais compris ce que signifie le mot *connard*.
>
> [If it hadn't been for you, I'd never have understood the meaning of the word asshole.][132]

Like Moutout's protagonist Philippe, Sommer is a loner with at least one failed personal relationship behind him. Furthermore, both are unable fully to interact with others: a fact that stifles them intellectually and socially. Sommer believes that his former lover, Sandra, left him because she was bored with living with a partner who routinely left the apartment early each morning for work, to return twelve hours later. He recalls how he was Sandra's first lover to have a full-time, permanent job and this seemed to be part of what attracted her to him.[133] It is here then that the novel's author, Lacroix, provides a brief commentary on the lack of job security in neoliberal society, where temporary contracts and precarity are the norm.[134] Sommer's long absences and insistence on always giving priority to work, no matter how much Sandra needed him, ultimately made the relationship untenable for her. As Sommer recollects incidents in his relationship with Sandra, the reader learns just how cold and detached he has been – although he invariably regards such behaviour as normal. Among other things, despite Sandra's repeated requests, Sommer refused to call the police while their neighbour was being regularly beaten up by her boyfriend. He and Sandra could clearly hear her screams for help through their apartment's party wall.[135] Early in the novel, in an attempt to reignite their relationship – but long after Sandra's departure – Sommer emails her a poem he has crafted in which he declares his continuing love for her.[136] Meanwhile, he finds himself physically attracted to one of his subordinates, Marie, but he has never dared to make his feelings known for fear that she might accuse him of harassment, or, if a relationship were to develop, favouritism by other colleagues.[137] As it turns out, Marie feels the same about him, but by the time she expresses her opinion it is too late because his health is about to decline unexpectedly and suddenly.[138] Sandra's response to his emailed poem, when it comes, is full of vitriol and disgust and gives Sommer and the reader a rare external insight into how far his perception of the world differs from actuality. Beyond a detailed description of his mechanical approach to lovemaking, Sandra writes:

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[131] Lacroix, *op.cit.*, 2015, p. 63.

[132] Lacroix, *op.cit.*, 2015, p. 164.

[133] Lacroix, *op.cit.*, 2015, p. 17.

[134] Jean-Claude Barbier, La précarité, une catégorie française à l'épreuve de la comparaison internationale, *Revue française de sociologie*, 2005/2, Vol. 46, pp. 351–371.

[135] Lacroix, *op.cit.*, 2015, p. 31.

> Je n'ai jamais, je te jure, croisé quelqu'un d'aussi insensible que toi. J'ai l'impression d'avoir vécu avec un bloc de glace, tu ne m'a jamais manifesté la moindre tendresse … S'il te plaît, arrête. Tu ne me fais pas plaisir en m'écrivant, tu grattes la plaie, tu me rappelles que j'ai perdu avec toi de précieuses années de jeunesse … Adieu donc – en espérant que ce message sera bien le dernier entre nous.
>
> [I swear I've never met anyone as insensitive as you. I feel like I've been living with an iceblock, you've never shown me the slightest tenderness … Please, stop. You're not making me happy by writing to me, you're scratching the wound, you're reminding me I've lost precious years of youth with you … Goodbye then – and I hope this will be the last message between us.][139]

Sommer is non-plussed by this email and, even though he deletes it, the contents continue to haunt him. They affect his ability to concentrate on work and bring back the memory of recent incidents where he felt he was seeing the world as if heavily intoxicated. This occurred, for instance, when he received a text message which seemed to come from his recently deceased mother which simply stated:

> Je t'embrasse.
>
> [Much love][140]

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[136] Lacroix, *op.cit.*, 2015, p. 27–28.

[137] Lacroix, *op.cit.*, 2015, p. 34.

[138] Lacroix, *op.cit.*, 2015, p. 133.

[139] Lacroix, *op.cit.*, 2015, pp. 20–21.

[140] Lacroix, *op.cit.*, 2015, p. 124.

He refuses to text the sender or phone back because he does not want to be thought of as mad. However, rather than seeing such events – which are increasing in frequency and duration, as signs of some internal malaise – he believes their source is external, that is, they flow from the general economic and social turmoil of modern times where millions die of famine and AIDS while others live comfortably in security.[141] He only begins to recognise that something within him has gone awry when his boss, Raymond, remarks that his complexion is green, at which point he realises he is covered in a cold sweat and shortly afterwards has a sensation of pins and needles between his left hand and shoulder and is then repeatedly and violently sick in the gents' toilets.[142]

Sommer's ability to connect with others is most unimpressive when it comes to his people management style. For instance, to maximise departmental productivity, he zealously manages subordinates by insisting they work in an open-plan office, as this is the best way for him to oversee and control what they are doing. On the other hand, and perhaps somewhat contrary to his generally antagonistic view of humanity, he believes that personalised ringtones on workers' mobile phones provide insights into their individual characteristics and add a degree of warmth to an otherwise fairly sterile work environment. He is also cold and detached when faced with individual suffering, as in the case of a young worker, Sebastien, who unexpectedly finds he has been dismissed by Sommer from his first job. Sebastien pleads with Sommer for a second chance. The latter's response is, however, brutally obdurate:

> J'ai besoin de gens qui pigent du premier coup, à toute vitesse … Tu n'es pas dans cette catégorie. Tu es lent, incapable d'envisager une problématique sous toutes les coutures, d'en faire le tour.
>
> [I need people who get it right the first time, at the double … You're not in that league. You're slow, unable to consider a problem from all angles, to work round it.][143]

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[141] Lacroix, *op.cit.*, 2015, pp. 125–126.

[142] Lacroix, *op.cit.*, 2015, pp. 128–134.

[143] Lacroix, *op.cit.*, 2015, p. 80.

Sommer knows that Sebastien's suffering will only worsen just before he leaves his work for good when his colleagues will mount a ritual farewell party and Sebastien will be presented with a mean goodbye present funded from a few meagre donations and Sommer himself will produce a short impromptu farewell speech, totally lacking in sincerity. This will represent the final opportunity for the organisation to impose psychological violence on Sebastien before he manages to escape the malevolent environment in which, ironically, he so much wants to belong.

Everyone but Sommer recognises that life should be more than work. He recalls the words of his osteopath:

> On n'est pas fait pour travailler tous le temps! Il faut aussi savoir profiter de la vie …
>
> [We're not built to work all the time ! You also need to know how to make the most of life …][144]

Contrary to his custom of always being on time, Sommer finds himself late for an important mid-afternoon, senior-management meeting where he is to present a progress report on his areas of responsibility. He is over-heating and having difficulties breathing. He performs badly at the meeting, then collapses in pain and his colleagues call for an ambulance.

Only in his last moments, surrounded by medical staff trying to save him, does Sommer understand, for the first time, what he has missed. By concentrating exclusively on intellectual work, unlike a manual worker, such as a carpenter or stonemason, he has no heritage to leave behind him.[145] It appears that, according to author Lacroix, this is the fate of the knowledge worker who devotes himself exclusively to his employment.

As the novel draws to a close Sommer imagines what he might say if now asked:

> Qui t'a tué? Dis-nous le nom de ton meurtrier!
>
> J'aurais répondu, sans doute,
>
> Le travail

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[144] Lacroix, *op.cit.*, 2015, p. 153.

[145] Lacroix, *op.cit.*, 2015, p. 155.

> [Who killed you? Tell us the name of your murderer!
>
> I would have undoubtedly answered,
>
> Work.][146]

Concluding comments

The three stories critically analysed earlier sought to examine the complex issues associated with the nature and practice of knowledge work in the contemporary world of business, against the backcloth of this chapter's introductory examination of key critical texts. They therefore provided a context within which audiences are able to assess how knowledge creation plays out in practice, where highly skilled workers interrogate large quantities of data, made available electronically, and attempt to distinguish past trends and future possibilities. They show audiences how this work differs from routinised 'material' employment, as well as how innovative ideas are generated. They demonstrate the tensions that arise between individuals, who willingly subjugate their own needs and identities for the corporate 'good', and then find they are isolated from family and friends, sometimes following bitter arguments about the negative, insular ways in which they act outside the workplace. They also illustrate how, in some instances, callous narcissistic behaviours can surface in the workplace itself, where individuals have been encouraged to believe in their intellectual superiority by their employing organisation.

The stories all examined how organisations try to pamper these key workers in order to extract their affective commitment and engage them deeply in progressing commercial objectives. These efforts are supported by coercive messaging, including the expression of mission statements that affirm total alignment between organisational and individual interests of both workers and customers. They comprise reductive performance assessment processes that attempt to quantify both measurable and non-measurable areas of performance, including in the latter case, such capabilities as 'innovation' and 'creativity'. Moreover, these provide vivid examples of how modern organisations manage through globalised digital networks, while direct management-worker relationships are negligible or effectively non-existent. This change in the way people management operates seems inevitable given the complexity and scale of many modern organisations, but it does support the tendency to dehumanise individual workers by disconnecting them from physical social networks. In summary, as evidenced by these stories, all these factors can generate a sense of psychological disharmony between the knowledge worker and their environment that can itself lead to personal suffering.

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[146] Lacroix, *op.cit.*, 2015, p. 157.

On balance, therefore, there appears to be a robust alignment between the critical commentaries and these narratives that suggests that their representation of work, and of psychological violence in particular, can reasonably be assumed to reflect the subjective experience of today's knowledge workers.

CHAPTER 5

Body and mind: Bullying and medicalisation at work

> Je me réveille hagarde et claquant des dents, allongée sur la moquette du salon, au milieu d'un fatras de papiers … La nourriture me réchauffe les tripes, mais mes pensées restent glacées. Je ne sais pas où j'en suis … Mon corps n'est plus qu'un tas de viande en souffrance, intoxiqué par la drogue …
>
> [I wake up worn out with my teeth chattering, lying on the living room carpet, in the middle of a mess of papers … Food warms my insides, but my thoughts stay frozen. I don't know where I'm at … My body is just a load of suffering meat intoxicated by drugs …][1]

This chapter critically analyses how French contemporary storytelling represents the mental suffering of workers as a treatable medical problem and as part of a social experience created by neoliberalism that is of an institutional rather than pathological nature. In particular, it uses an analytical framework, focused on organisational discourse and power relationships, that is derived from the works of Michel Foucault, and that:

> presents a consonant vision of a world in which individuals' lives are experienced and understood through the discourses and practices of medicine and its allied professions.[2]

The chapter scrutinises the associated trauma of occupational physicians who are caught up in a culture of systemic violence where their lack of both position power and professional influence may, paradoxically, both lessen and contribute to the culture of bullying. This environment may also have a destructive impact on their own mental stability as exemplified by Dr Carole Matthieu, the main protagonist in the novel, *Les visages écrasés*, quoted earlier. Such distress has been variously labelled 'burnout', 'passion fatigue' or 'l'usure de compassion' and is evidenced in the work of contemporary psychologists, such as Marie Pezé, also discussed in the following.[3]

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[1] Marin Ledun, *Les visages écrasés* (Paris: Seuil, 2011), pp. 320–321.

[2] Deborah Lupton, "Chapter 5: Foucault and the Medicalisation Critique," in *Foucault, Health and Medicine*, eds Robin Burton and Alan Petersen (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 98, pp. 94–106.

The term 'medicalisation' is used here to describe:

> … a process by which non-medical problems become defined and treated as medical problems, usually in terms of illness and disorders. Some analysts have suggested that the growth of medical jurisdiction is 'one of the most potent transformations of the last half of the twentieth century in the West'.[4]

In addition, this chapter examines the use of tools and processes developed as part of psychological theory and applied to employment relationships, that is, so-called 'psychologisation' of the workplace which, as stated earlier, can be viewed as 'allied' to the medicalisation phenomenon. The contemporary focus on psychology in the world of work embraces, but is not restricted to, the recruitment of occupational psychologists, often within an organisation's HR department. Among other things, this trend can be seen in the widespread use by HR departments of individual behavioural competencies, as well as initiatives to create high-performance teams and talent management programmes.[5]

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[3] One might argue that, in the era before modern science, mental illness carried the stigma of being a sentence from God, directed against those considered to have sinned. It may be that this attitude still holds some credence in parts of modern society. See, for instance, the following Old Testament quote: 'The Lord will afflict you with madness, blindness and confusion of mind'. (Deuteronomy 28:28) [online] <https://biblehub.com/deuteronomy/28-28.htm> [accessed 21/08/2018]. See also: Madeleine Fortier, *Usure de compassion: jusqu'où aller sans se brûler?* (Québec : Presses inter-universitaires, 2018) and Marie Pezé, *Ils ne mouraient pas tous mais tous étaient frappés: Journal de la consultation 'Souffrance et Travail' 1997–2008* (Montreuil: Pearson, 2008).

[4] Peter Conrad, *The Medicalization of Society* (Baltimore, MD: The John Hopkins University Press, 2007), p. 4.

[5] Stanislas Morel, L'ambivalence de la psychologisation des rapports de travail dans les institutions « psy » *Sociologies pratiques* 2008/2 (n° 17), pp. 67–79 [online] <https://www.cairn.info/revue-sociologies-pratiques-2008-2-page-67.htm#> [accessed 19/05/2020]. See also : Sophie d'Armagnac, Alain Klarsfeld, Claude

According to the INRS, the French State health and safety research institute, the country has witnessed an increasing incidence of individuals seeking aid from health practitioners for psychosocial disorders ('risques psychosociaux' – RPS) in the workplace. Such conditions include:

> Troubles de la concentration, du sommeil, irritabilité, nervosité, fatigue importante, palpitations … Indépendamment de leurs effets sur la santé des individus, les risques psychosociaux ont un impact sur le fonctionnement des entreprises (absentéisme, turnover, ambiance de travail …). Il est possible de les prévenir.
>
> [Concentration difficulties, sleeping, irritability, nervousness, severe fatigue, palpitations, etc. Besides their effects on the health of individuals, psychosocial risks impact the operation of organisations (absenteeism, staff turnover, work atmosphere, etc.). It is possible to prevent this happening.][6]

Finally, to illustrate how these issues are represented in storytelling, this chapter critically examines two novels and their film adaptations. The first pairing focusses on the pressures facing an occupational physician in her daily work. These are the novel, *Les visages écrasés*, and its film adaptation, *Carole Matthieu*.[7] The second pairing examines the novel, *La question humaine* and its film adaptation of the same name. These deal with how an in-house occupational psychologist comes to terms with the individual suffering his work has imposed on numerous workers.[8]

Martignon, La gestion des talents : définitions, modèles, pratiques d'entreprises, *@GRH, la revue de l'association francophone de gestion des ressources humaines*, 2016/3 (n° 20), pp. 9–41 [online] <https://www.cairn.info/revue-@grh-2016-3-page-9.htm> [19/05/2020].

[6] *Dossier: risques psychosociaux*, Institut national de recherche et de sécurité pour la prévention des accidents du travail et des maladies professionnelles (INRS) [online] <http://www.inrs.fr/risques/psychosociaux/ce-qu-il-faut-retenir.html> [accessed 20/08/2018].

[7] Ledun, *Les visages* (2011), Louis-Julien Petit, *Carole Matthieu*, Paradis Films, 2016.

[8] François Emmanuel, *La question humaine* (Paris: Stock, 2000) and Nicolas Klotz, *La question humaine* (Sophie Dulac Distribution, 2007).

Physicians and psychologists: A difference in status

The 'médecin du travail' plays a key role in the occupational health and safety arena in France. This role is underpinned by law. They alone, as clinicians, have the access rights and skills to address workplace suffering where it actually occurs. They are invariably salaried employees within organisations and have statutory protection against dismissal.[9] This situation is unlike that in a number of other European countries, including the UK, where general medical practitioners frequently undertake this work with no specialist training in this area.[10]

The situation for occupational psychologists in France is, however, very different. 'Psychologues du travail' operate at this level without any statutory protections and may find themselves, either employed within a human resources department, or as external professionals, for instance, business consultants commissioned by an organisation to carry out a specific task, such as executive recruitment.[11] Given this perspective, the critical literature and fiction suggest that occupational psychologists may sometimes lack independence and so not always work primarily to help individuals cope with and overcome workplace suffering. Indeed, such specialists, given their portfolio of skills, can operate as delegated enforcers of people policies in the same way as HR specialists. They are integral to the machinery of the neoliberal organisation, whose principal motivation is to encourage individuals to perform beyond expectations, that is, to work sometimes outside their personal comfort zone and therefore beyond their capabilities. Thus, in these circumstances, psychologists can actually aggravate mental suffering, rather than alleviate it.[12] Furthermore, academic research suggests that, in general terms, 'outcome-based control systems', including those associated with performance management and reward, can lead to morally questionable conduct. This could include an in-house occupational psychologist encouraging middle managers to take risky decisions which may put both themselves and the organisation in jeopardy.[13]

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[9] Workplace occupational physicians have had a special legal status in France since 1942 and, as workers, can only be dismissed with prior labour inspectorate authorisation [online] Le médecin du travail, *droit-travail-france.fr*, <https://www.droit-travail-france.fr/medecin-travail.php> [accessed 23/11/2019]. See: Articles L. 4623-1 à L. 4623-8 et R. 4623-2 à R. 4623-24 du *Code du travail* [online] <http://www.inrs.fr/demarche/services-sante-travail/medecin-travail.html> [accessed 09/09/2019].

[10] There were almost 5,300 occupational physicians working in France in 2018 with an average age of 55. Almost all (99 per cent) were employed within one or more organisations, while most (69 per cent) were female – a fact reflected in the lived experiences quoted in this chapter, as well as the fictional stories referenced. *Chiffres clés – médecins du travail* [online] <https://www.profilmedecin.fr/contenu/chiffres-cles-medecin-du-travail/> [accessed 20/08/2018]. <https://www.staffsante.fr/contenu/psychologue-chiffres-cles/> [accessed 01/08/2021]. See also: Viktor Kempa, Médecine du travail dans l'Union européenne: tentative de cartographie. *La médecine du travail aux urgences*, European Trade Union Institute, *HesaMag #10*, 2ème semestre 2014, pp. 16–17.

[11] In 2016 there were an estimated 57,000 enterprise-based psychologists in France. *Nombre de psychologues en France de 2010 à 2016*, statista.com [online] <https://fr.statista.com/statistiques/702566/nombre-de-psychologues-france/>; while the

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number of students registered on psychology courses 'équivaut au quart des inscrits de tous les pays d'Europe', *Audition du Syndicat National des Psychologues par la commission université – emploi* du ministère des universités, 6 septembre 2006 [online].

Unlike the 'médecin du travail', the lack of statutory regulation or protection for qualified 'psychologues du travail' in France arises from the way the 'profession' has evolved and the many environments in which psychologists work [online] <http://www.enseignementsup-recherche.gouv.fr/cid66177/psychologue-une-profession-reglementee-en-france.html> [accessed 23/08/2018]. For instance, it is not clear how many psychologists work at enterprise level in recruitment, assessment, training, organisation design and coaching. Alain Paineau, *'Métier: psychologue' ou 'Métiers de la psychologie'*, Atelier du congrès de 2005 de la Société française de Psychologie (Version 1.3 – Octobre 2004 5/42 [online] <https://fliphtml5.com/bwzm/pvze/basic> [accessed 17/08/2018] and [online] <http://geza.roheim.pagesperso-orange.fr/html/droitpsy.htm> [accessed 23/08/2018].

[12] Marc Loriol, La médicalisation des difficultés et conflits au travail: le cas du harcèlement moral en France. *Revue Économique et Sociale*, Société d'études économiques et sociales Lausanne, Suisse, 2016, 74, pp. 21–32.

[13] Steven H. Appelbaum, Ivan Ulises Soltero, and Keith Neville, "The Creation of an Unethical Work Environment: Organisational Outcome-Based Control Systems," *Equal Opportunities International* 24, no. 2: pp. 67–83 [online] <https://doi.org/10.1108/02610150510788024> [accessed 17/08/2018].

A Foucauldian discourse

The positioning of both physicians and psychologists in neoliberal organisations, including their level of relative status with regard to other actors in the workplace and their influence, can be critically assessed by examining these factors from the perspective of Foucault's theoretical ideas on discourse and its relationship to medicine.[14] Foucault maintains that power and knowledge are inextricably intertwined, as can be seen in Figure 6 that illustrates how discourse is controlled by and plays out between actors in the workplace and how such messaging broadly incorporates notions of medicalisation and psychologisation. The aim of this particular outline model is to help reveal the power relationships between senior management, an occupational physician, an in-house psychologist and a worker as four overlapping and competing discourses.[15]

Foucault defines discourse as anything written, spoken or communicated using signs. As argued throughout this study, discourse can be subtly influenced and controlled by use of jargon, especially terminology that is wilfully ambiguous, and that can be misunderstood and/or potentially threatening. This includes organisational communications that promote health and safety at work at the same time as 'dark', coercive HR messages highlighting the importance of maintaining a high-performance culture at all times and at all costs. It also comprises any technical terminology and techniques used by medical professionals that may obfuscate patient understanding.

Foucault's pioneering study, first published in 1963, on the working methods in mid-eighteenth-century French teaching hospital physicians may still be significant here, with respect to today's workplace clinicians. Foucault maintained that physicians asserted power by applying their

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[14] Michel Foucault, *L'Ordre du discours* [online] <http://1libertaire.free.fr/Foucault64.html> [accessed 22/09/2019].

[15] Derek Hook, "Discourse, Knowledge, Materiality, History: Foucault and Discourse Analysis," *LSE Research Online* [online] <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/30521159_Discourse_Knowledge_Materiality_History_Foucault_and_Discourse_Analysis> [accessed 11/11/2019].

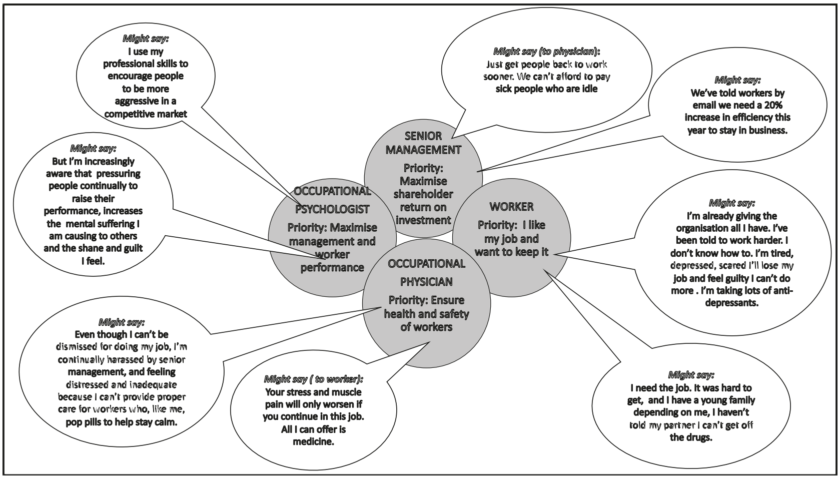
Might say: I use my professional skills to encourage people to be more aggressive in a competitive market
Might say: But I'm increasingly aware that pressuring people continually to raise their performance, increases the mental suffering I am causing to others and the shane and guilt I feel.
OCCUPATIONAL PSYCHOLOGIST Priority: Maximise management and worker performance
Might say (to physician): Just get people back to work sooner. We can't afford to pay sick people who are idle
SENIOR MANAGEMENT Priority: Maximise shareholder return on investment
Might say: We've told workers by email we need a 20% increase in efficiency this year to stay in business.
WORKER Priority: I like my job and want to keep it
Might say: I'm already giving the organisation all I have. I've been told to work harder. I don't know how to. I'm tired, depressed, scared I'll lose my job and feel guilty I can't do more . I'm taking lots of anti-depressants.
OCCUPATIONAL PHYSICIAN Priority: Ensure health and safety of workers
Might say: Even though I can't be dismissed for doing my job, I'm continually harassed by senior management, and feeling distressed and inadequate because I can't provide proper care for workers who, like me, pop pills to help stay calm.
Might say (to worker): Your stress and muscle pain will only worsen if you continue in this job. All I can offer is medicine.
Might say: I need the job. It was hard to get, and I have a young family depending on me, I haven't told my partner I can't get off the drugs.

Figure 6. Power relationships and competing discourses about the workplace and medicalisation: a Foucauldian perspective

'regard clinique' ['clinical gaze'] selectively to focus strictly on the body and to filter out non-biomedical variables, such as those relating to identity. This made it easier for physicians to compartmentalise patients into categories while they projected an image of themselves as authoritative experts equipped with scientific objectivity.[16]

Given contemporary developments, for instance, in use of simulations, digital imaging and metadata, the formulation and application of the 'regard clinique' has clearly evolved.[17] However, there are at least two risks that remain relevant and that surface in the fiction analysed in this chapter. Firstly, the patient may still be reduced to a passive, docile state. Secondly, the inherent nature of this approach, which depends on deep analysis of physical symptoms, means that the level of personal engagement required by the clinician can sometimes threaten their ability to remain apart from the suffering observed, because an emotional bond is established with the patient that may evolve into a form of secondary trauma, with psychological and physical symptoms of their own. As we learn in the story *Les visages écrasés / Carole Matthieu*, the eponymous clinician finds herself the indirect target of psychological violence perpetrated by an organisation when she places herself between a demanding and powerful employer and a vulnerable, psychologically damaged worker.

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[16] Michel Foucault, *Naissance de la clinique* (Paris : PUF, 1963), p. 127.

[17] Alan Bleakley and John Bligh, "Who Can Resist Foucault?" *The Journal of Medicine and Philosophy: A Forum for Bioethics and Philosophy of Medicine* 34, no. 4 (August 2009): pp. 368–383 [online] <https://doi.org/10.1093/jmp/jhp028> [accessed 22/05/2020].

Figure 6 explores how the organisation can exert its economic power over all internal actors by habitually pressurising them to improve performance in an environment where power is distributed unequally and senior management, as the agent of shareholders, always dominates. Management reactions to manifested psychological conditions of workers suggest that these individuals are sometimes treated as if they were in some way 'abnormal', as opposed simply reacting negatively against organisational pressures caused by a business culture that gives primacy to increasing performance at all costs. Conceivably, the perception that the individual is at the heart of the problem is, not unnaturally, fostered by managers with a penchant for bullying because this stance provides a defence against criticism of their own oppressive conduct. Such behaviour would include managers pursuing rigorous application of a Management By Objectives (MBO) process, including unilaterally allocating objectives or targets to individual workers where workers cannot influence the course of events. Thus, if the objective is achieved, it will be in spite of the workers' efforts; and if the worker fails, they will probably be regarded as lacking in capability. Neoliberalism does not often appear to permit itself to be challenged.[18]

Next, the occupational physician uses their professional skills to penetrate the depths of each worker's malaise by exploring, seeking to understand and addressing underlying health issues, while under constant organisational pressure to ensure worker-patients return to their jobs as soon as possible. It seems reasonable to assume that the physician is likely to recognise that the only way sustainably to allay or remedy the worker's 'condition' is for the latter to end their employment relationship because the work environment itself is the underlying cause of this malady. However, the physician is repeatedly urged by the organisation to provide a (short-term) medical solution to secure the worker's swift return to their post. The pressure imposed on the physician to deliver an optimal solution for the organisation that wants a 'quick fix' eventually leads the fictional Dr Carole Matthieu to self-destruct.

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[18] Yves Clot and Michel Gollac, *Le travail, peut-il devenir supportable?* (Paris: Armand Colin, Second edition, 2017), pp. 48–67. See also: Yves Clot, *Le travail sans l'homme? Pour une psychologie des milieux de travail et de vie* (Paris: La Découverte, 2008, Kindle edition).

The comments the occupational psychologist makes in this model reflect those In the novel and film, *La condition humaine*, where an in-house occupational psychologist is attached to the HR department and has a clear mandate to improve performance until recognising that this mission, when taken to extremes, leads to loss of individual dignity and mental suffering, for management, workers and the psychologist himself.

Next, the worker feels shame and guilt at not being able to cope with organisational demands, including physical working conditions that induce pain, and ongoing psychological violence from managers. They may also feel subjectively isolated at work and at home. Senior management's response to dealing with its own work pressures is, in turn, to bully their subordinates. Workers are particularly vulnerable here because they lack the workplace physician's professional expertise and statutory protection against dismissal under French law. Plausibly, the internal discourses of these actors are so divergent that they can never completely coincide.

Both the physician and in-house psychologist in the stories analysed in this chapter reflect on their inability to counter the deleterious impacts of systemic violence. These stories also represent organisational discourse as a process that aims to enforce organisational command and control mechanisms that continually strive to raise performance, while turning a deaf ear to the needs of others and ignoring the fact that individual human capacity to improve performance is clearly finite. They reflect how organisational pressures can transform clinical professionals into perpetrators of psychological, and indeed physical, violence.

States of trauma

Psychologist, Christophe Dejours maintains, on the basis of many years of clinical experience, that the way we experience work is subjective and reflects how we understand life as a whole. Thus, suffering at work can be deeply distressing, that is, it creates trauma and profoundly affects the individual physically and mentally.[19]

According to sociologist, Marc Loriol, psychologisation of work has increasingly shifted the focus of understanding the causes of mental suffering from the organisation to the individual, not only because of how we treat it, but because of the way we think about and discuss it:

> Ainsi, les conflits et les problèmes, comme les réussites, sont attribués au caractères, aux défauts ou aux qualités des personnes impliquées: un service marche bien car son chef est très compétent, une innovation échoue parce que les salariés sont conservateurs ou les relations hiérarchiques sont mauvaises en raison du caractère hystérique du directeur.
>
> [So, conflicts and problems, along with successes, are attributed to the character, shortcomings or qualities of those involved: a department works well because its manager is very competent, an innovation fails because workers are conservative, or organisational relationships are bad because of manager's hysterical nature.][20]

As already discussed, the way organisations structure their performance management processes, which tie business success to the achievement of individual objectives, cascaded down from the chief executive to shop floor or administrative workers, supports this view. It is conceivable that the inability of individuals to succeed in organisations which apply such processes makes workers themselves responsible and ultimately accountable for any failures, even where objectives are ill-defined by management, including when imposed on workers who cannot influence their delivery.[21]

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[19] Christophe Dejours, *Travail, usure mentale: essai de psychopathologie du travail* (Paris : La Centurion, 1980).

[20] Marc Loriol, Les ressorts de la psychologisation des difficultés au travail. Une comparaison entre infirmières, policiers et conducteurs de bus, *Cahiers de recherche sociologique*, Nouveau malaise dans la civilisation, No. 41–43 [online] <http://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1002466ar/> [accessed 23/08/2018].

By examining such developments more closely we can recognise, as reflected in lived experience and its fictional representation, an individualisation of workplace health problems, with attention deflected from their structural causes, that derive from business needs, to the alleged mental frailty of particular workers. Thus, in practice, the physical design of workplaces is arrived at by an examination of how best to maximise productivity.[22] Meanwhile, considerations of particular individual physical needs, such as sufficient leg-space under a desk, or a call-centre headset that will fit comfortably and securely on every worker, as opposed to just operating well as a telephone device, are either secondary or simply ignored.[23]

There is also evidence, beyond the fictional examples given earlier, that the sheer pressure and scale of this suffering may be transferred from worker-patients, particularly bullying targets, to workplace physicians. In a harrowing memoir, Marie Pezé, the clinical psychologist who, in 1997 created *Souffrance et travail*, France's independent consultative support network for workers dealing with psychosocial distress, presents a series of striking case studies on the nature of psychological violence and its impact on her personally. These include the tale of a secretary harassed by her superior who forced her to stick stamps exactly 4 mm from the edge of envelopes, ruler in hand. Pezé starkly relates how the negative effects of dealing with all this trauma 'second-hand' had a direct physical and psychological impact on her and impeded her ability to remain detached, which is so fundamental to Foucault's approach:

> Je n'ai pas vu venir l'épuisement. Comme mes patients, 'la tête dans le guidon', submergée de situations d'urgence, sans aide, ni intendance, je n'ai pas senti ma descente. En quelques semaines, je perds l'usage de mon bras droit, avec le cortège

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[21] Peter Drucker, *The Practice of Management* (New York: Harper & Row, 1954).

[22] An excellent fictional example of this practice is provided in the time-management exercise spectators witness in Jean-Marc Moutout's film, *Violence des échanges en milieu tempéré*, critically analysed in Chapter 3.

[23] Clot and Gollac, *Le travail* (2017).

> des troubles neurologiques qu'accompagne une atteinte de la moelle épinière. […] Je suis dans le trou noir de la décompensation.
>
> [I didn't see the exhaustion coming. Like my patients, with my head in the sand, overwhelmed by emergencies, without help or oversight, I didn't recognise I was going down. Over a few weeks, I lost the use of my right arm, along with the associated neurological problems of a damaged spinal cord. […] I was in the black hole of failing to cope psychologically].[24]

Pezé is far from being alone here. Novelist Marin Ledun is a former France Télécom worker. He recalls the resignation in 2009 of the occupational physician Catherine Morel, after a lengthy career at this company in Grenoble. She stressed that the main reason for her resignation was:

> l'impossibilité d'exercer [son] métier et donc ce sentiment d'être cantonnée à un rôle d'écoute de la souffrance sans aucun moyen d'action pour faire évoluer ce constat.
>
> [the impossibility of doing [her] job and so having this feeling of being confined to a role listening to suffering without any means of action to move on].[25]

There are other contemporary non-fictional narratives that illustrate the challenges associated with the work carried out by the specialist, enterprise-based 'médecin du travail'. These include a study by sociologist, Pascal Marichalar, which examines how employers have deliberately sought to restrict the physician's role by cutting costs and reducing the employer's exposure to risk here.[26] Meanwhile, Dorothée Ramaut, an occupational physician, uses her autobiographical witness statement [témoignage] to set out a journal of events that she observed while working in a hypermarket in the years 2000–2006. The reader learns here not only about the level of worker suffering, including mental bullying, but also the negative impact that witnessing this misery had on her. In one instance senior head-office executives failed to answer her registered letters in which she complained about local management's negative comments on sickness absence by workers, such as:

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[24] Pezé, *Ils ne mouraient pas* (2008), pp. 84–85.

[25] Marin Ledun, Brigitte Font Le Bret, and Bernard Floris (Préface), *Pendant qu'ils comptent les morts: Entretien avec un ancien salarié de France Télécom et une médecin psychiatre* (Paris: Le tengo, 2010), p. 53.

[26] Pascal Marichalar, La médecine du travail sans les médecins: Une action patronale de longue haleine (1971–2010). *Politix*, 91(3), 2010, pp. 27–52 [online] <https://doi.org/10.3917/pox.091.0027> [accessed 09/09/2019].

> 'C'est très facile de se faire passer pour malade, on vient vous voir, on pleure un peu, et le tour est joué.'
>
> [It's really easy to pretend you're ill, you come and have a little cry and that's it.][27]

Ramaut writes of her difficulty staying above the fray and simply doing her job, especially when the human resources director denied there was any problem and counselled her not to feed any media interest because:

> 'Cela et mauvais pour le commerce … Il ne faut pas que les chiffres baissent'.
>
> [It's bad for business … you mustn't let the numbers drop.][28]

This then is a further example of neoliberal management's dedication to numbers and performance measurement as part of its creed of control over employee behaviours. The sense of frustration and despair felt by Ramaut is mirrored in Sophie Bruneau and Marc-Antoine Roudil's 2005 film documentary, where hospital specialists listen to and assess the medical conditions of patients with experience of workplace suffering. This shares the same title as Pezé's 2008 written memoir.[29]

In his ground-breaking 1976 US study on workplace bullying, Carroll Brodsky, a former medical examiner, working quite independently of similar research elsewhere, describes how both visible and invisible symptoms can be drawn out by a skilled clinician through a combination of sight, hearing and touch in order to ascertain the precise nature of a particular malaise.[30] Brodsky drew evidence from around 1,000 workers' sickness claims made in the US for financial support to explain how bullying and suffering, including psychological violence, are deeply rooted in the human condition and integral to the social context of working life in what was then the nascent neoliberal economy.[31]

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[27] Dorothée Ramaut, *Journal d'un médecin du travail* (Paris: Le cherche midi, 2006), p. 103.

[28] Ramaut, *Journal* (2006), p. 116.

[29] Sophie Bruneau and Marc-Antoine Roudil, *Il ne mouraient pas tous mais tous étaient frappés*, Bodega Films, 2005.

[30] Foucault, *Naissance* (1975), pp. 207–239.

The works of Brodsky and Foucault can now be seen as part of a general social trend in recent decades to seek to improve the human condition through better diagnosis of illness, prevention and treatment. Within the world of work this has focussed mainly on improved health and safety protection and its enforcement through legislation, rather than changing the neoliberal business model.[32] Janine Pierret, a clinical sociologist, believes that today we no longer settle for merely combatting sickness, but focus instead on sustaining health, particularly through risk avoidance strategies.[33] Examples here would therefore include better physical protection for those using potentially dangerous equipment, organisation-based wellness initiatives (see Chapter 2) and providing medicines prophylactically, that is, in anticipation of a decline in an individual's health because of the environment in which they work.

There is therefore an abundance of hard evidence to indicate that medicalisation may suppress workplace suffering in the short term but it does not attack its root causes, that is, the underlying philosophy of neoliberal organisations that maximising shareholder value is of primary importance and that the interests of individual workers will invariably come a poor second. This picture is clearly reflected in the analyses of stories set out in the following.

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[31] C. M. Brodsky, *The Harassed Worker* (Lexington, MA: D.C. Heath & Company, 1976).

[32] See for instance the very thorough review of French workplace health and safety regulation at [online] <http://www.officiel-prevention.com/protections-individuelles/risque-biologique-chimique/detail_dossier_CHSCT.php?rub=91&ssrub=186&dossid=553> [accessed 16/04/2018].

[33] Janine Pierret, Entre santé et expérience de la maladie *Psychotropes* No. 2, Vol. 14, 2008, pp. 47–59 <https://www.cairn.info/revue-psychotropes-2008-2-page-47.htm> [accessed 16/04/2018].

Les visages écrasés/Carole Matthieu

Overcome by a dreadful sense of guilt and inadequacy in the face of seemingly endless systemic violence, occupational physician Carol Matthieu, in Marin Ledun's novel, turns mercy killer as the only way of providing relief and release for the psychologically oppressed workers she encounters during her daily routine. She is so bound up with her patients that she suffers their pain as well as her own which she strives to reduce through increasing amounts of self-medication.

This novel also demonstrates the blurring of working and social life under neoliberalism and, according to Boltanski and Chiapello, how in general terms:

> Il devient dès lors difficile de faire la distinction entre le temps de la vie privée et le temps de la vie professionnelle, entre les dîners avec les copains et les repas d'affaires, entre les liens affectifs et les relations utiles …
>
> [It becomes difficult to distinguish between private and working time, between dinners with friends and business meals, between emotional ties and useful relationships …][34]

Or, as Carole succinctly puts it in Ledun's novel:

> 'Je n'ai plus de vie privée.'
>
> *[I don't have a private life anymore]*[35]

Thus, we see Carole completely absorbed and afflicted by her work at all times of the day, to the extent that she feels guilty because she is unable to do more to alleviate the suffering of others, while her own suffering increases as her mental state worsens. She finds herself in a unique position within the organisation. As a medical professional she uses her professional judgement, in line with Foucault's analysis, to assess in depth the human condition of those around her. She is also able to gaze inwardly at her own deteriorating physical and mental state.

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[34] Luc Boltanski and Ève Chiapello, *Le nouvel esprit du capitalisme* (Paris: Gallimard, 2011), p. 254.

[35] Ledun, *Les visages* (2011), p. 212.

As the epigraph to this chapter illustrates, storytelling can improve our understanding and probe the complexities of workplace suffering, especially mental bullying, by thrusting the reader and spectator deep inside the tortured minds of both the engaged therapeutic professional and those suffering workers struggling to perform in a neoliberal environment.

While labelled a 'thriller' by its publisher, *Les visages écrasés* is not a simple 'whodunit?'. The reader knows the answer to this question and the motive for the murder that propels the novel forward almost from the outset. Neither does the novel really pose the question: 'Will the perpetrator be caught?' Given that Carole does not attempt to cover her tracks at any point and is increasingly reckless with her own health, death by her own hand seems the most likely denouement. Paradoxically, despite her murderous actions, the reader's sympathies are with the main protagonist and the individuals whose lives she ends because, in the final analysis, they are all presented as victims. The major antagonist is the brutal culture of the neoliberal organisation. Further, since the narrative presents itself mainly as a first-person memoir written by the killer, it does not give the impression of being a police procedural novel. In fact, Richard Revel, the detective leading the murder enquiry, only becomes central to the novel halfway through the narrative, as the reader learns that he is sexually fascinated by Carole. Yet the idea of how their eventual and brief coupling might affect the investigation is never developed to the extent that it becomes a complication in the murder investigation.[36]

Above all, this novel, rooted in realistic description, is a study of how the machinery at the heart of the neoliberal economy – the commercial enterprise – can negatively impact on the human spirit and individual identity. The primary setting of this novel is a call centre in Valence in south-east France. This is a tumultuous world viewed through the eyes of a 'médecin du travail' who, we learn, is a dedicated and socially isolated 42-year-old divorcée. Carole's only family link is with her daughter, Vanessa, who is largely absent in person from the novel, although she and Carole share a string of brief telephone messages.

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[36] Ledun, *Les visages* (2011), p. 337.

A contemporary confessor of the body and mind, rather than the soul, Carole observes, listens, provides a conduit for numerous personal revelations and then records the suffering of the seemingly endless stream of employees who visit her surgery with:

> '(l)eurs aveux, leurs larmes, leur culpabilité, leur honte surtout'.
>
> [especially their confessions, their tears, their guilt, their shame].[37]

They are each overwhelmed by the unrelenting, escalating demands of the organisation, including unexpected and sudden changes to organisational priorities, constant monitoring of incoming calls with customers and loss of pay for any sickness absence.[38] The workplace rules are strict and the content of this underlying 'discourse' must be obeyed, including:

> '4. Pas de pause avant l'heure (même d'1 minute). On ne reste pas non plus en Wrap up plusieurs minutes en attendant l'heure de partir …'
>
> [4. No breaks before the top of the hour (not even for 1 minute). Neither is it permissible to stay in a Wrap up session for several minutes waiting for time to pass …][39]

This system mirrors the managerial practices described by clinical sociologist Vincent de Gaulejac:

> autour de la politique du chiffre … de la culture de la haute performance exclusivement centrée sur l'amélioration des résultats financiers. Dans ce contexte, le management ne joue plus ce rôle médiateur pour favoriser le 'bien travailler'. Il a globalement basculé du côté des exigences des actionnaires.
>
> [as regards the policy of numbers … high performance culture is exclusively focused on improving financial results. In this context, management no longer plays this

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[37] Ledun, *Les visages* (2011), p. 33.

[38] Ledun, *Les visages* (2011), pp. 21–22.

[39] Ledun, *Les visages* (2011), p. 42.

> mediating role to promote 'good work'. It has generally changed focus to address the needs of shareholders].[40]

Organisational discourse appears to infantilise workers, who, before leaving at the end of the working day, are ordered to:

> '… débarrassez vos gobelets, vos feuilles de brouillon, vos photos perso, en 2 mots "votre bordel". Conseil: rangez votre casque, vos cahiers et crayons dans vos tiroirs'
>
> [… dispose of your cups, your scraps of paper, your personal photos, in other words "your mess". Tip: put your headset, notebooks and pencils in your drawers].[41]

According to Carole, the results of this ruthless regime manifest themselves through behavioural problems, insomnia, sickness, tears, screaming, hair-loss, anti-depressants and competition between workers, who are:

> prêt à tout pour avoir un poste, un projet, la place d'un autre. Les salariés prêts à tout pour commander, diriger, manager. Les machines. Les humains transformés en robots.
>
> [ready to do anything to secure a job, a project, a colleague's job. Workers ready to do anything to command, direct, manage. Machines. Humans transformed into robots].[42]

However, all she can do is listen, provide drugs and refer workers for outside treatment.

The organisation has a history of employee suffering, including suicide, and Carole sees herself as a perpetual thorn in the side of the organisation, a 'contre pouvoir urticant', who works with the statutory backing of the State medical authorities but, paradoxically, is an employee of the organisation.[43]

While perceived as a guardian angel by the many workers who consult her, Carole struggles increasingly with her own demons whose existence is sustained by her inability to cope with the misery and psychological desolation that surrounds her. Her only sustained succour comes from increasing amounts of alcohol and, especially, drugs including:

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[40] Gilles Arnaud and Jean-Philippe Bouilloud, Entretien avec Vincent de Gaulejac: Le sujet au cœur des paradoxes du management, *Nouvelle revue de psycho-sociologie* 2012/1 (n° 13) pp. 265–275.

[41] Ledun, *Les visages* (2011), p. 42.

[42] Ledun, *Les visages* (2011), p. 132.

[43] Ledun, *Les visages* (2011), p. 47.

> Anorexigènes, psycho-analeptiques, stimulants, somnifères et psychotropes.
>
> [Anorectics, psychoanaleptics, stimulants, sleeping pills and psychotropic medications].[44]

The descriptions of drugs she and her patients take are used by Ledun to strengthen the reader's image of Carole as a medical expert with a deep understanding of the impact of medicines on the mind and body. As opposed to her actions, her professional dedication is unimpeachable.

In the midst of this maelstrom of misery, Carole recognises that, according to the organisation, her role is strictly limited to helping individuals who have incurred a physical injury at work, while suffering which 'passe dans la tête' has its roots elsewhere. In fact, management denies any accusation that the working environment generates suffering. The fundamental cause, it says, stems from the worker's domestic life. Management therefore considers itself an innocent bystander, not the prime perpetrator. It maintains implacably that:

> Un salarié qui tente de se suicider sera presque soupçonné de vouloir nuire à l'image de son employeur. Ou, plus grave, au monde du travail en général.
>
> [Workers who try to take their own lives will almost be suspected of wanting to damage their employer's image. Or, more seriously, the world of work in general.][45]

Faced with such chilling denial, Carole sets herself two objectives. First, she commits herself to relieve suffering by shooting a worker who visits her office desperately in need of help. She fires at point-blank range at his forehead as he sits opposite her. This is:

> Un acte médical. En même temps qu'un soulagement.
>
> [A medical act. Simultaneously, a release.][46]

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[44] Ledun, *Les visages* (2011), p. 339.
[45] Ledun, *Les visages* (2011), p. 53.
[46] Ledun, *Les visages* (2011), p. 37.

As she sees it, this is the only way he can die with dignity.

This is an activity she repeats throughout the novel, eventually killing four workers, while continuing to believe that she retains the moral high ground. Her second task is to create a record of the history of the organisation's behaviour, based on detailed evidence, to demonstrate the organisation's direct culpability for the psychosocial stress around her. She achieves this by carefully putting together her own memoir – a record of her experiences – which blends her direct involvement in events with documentation earlier received from outside medical experts, including psychologists, and management. These fictional, yet realistic, documents are carefully positioned throughout the novel. Together with Carole's first-person memoir, from the murder of her first victim to her own demise, the reader is therefore presented not just with a history of systemic violence and subsequent worker suffering through Carole's eyes, but with a contextual narrative which provides evidentiary weight about the nature and source of such violence. Further, the novel's chapter 18, which provides a description of violence directly suffered by Carole herself, gives the reader additional evidence about why she is so driven to eradicate this culture. This interweaving of narrative with supporting reference documents is a powerful one. The partial sequence analysis in Table 3 illustrates how the author has deliberately structured the novel so that events are disclosed in a non-linear manner, that is, both the narrative and reference material are used to increase the persuasive impact of Carole's case, build intrigue and drive the plot forward.

Les visages écrasés is not an overtly political tract but Ledun leaves us in no doubt where his sympathies lie when, in the closing lines of the novel, the author speaks directly to the reader for the first and only time. This occurs after Carole has sought redemption in the only way possible, through suicide. Ledun recalls Carole's broken corpse lying at the bottom of the cliff from which she has jumped:

> '[Elle] n'a jamais été aussi belle que ce mercredi 18 mars 2009, presque 8 heures du matin, quand les bras du lieutenant Richard Revel se sont glissés sous sa colonne vertébrale brisée …'

Table 3. *Les visages écrasés*: Partial temporal sequencing analysis (prologue to chap.12, then chaps 18, 43 and epilogue only)

Chapter	Date	Comment
Prologue	13/03/2009	Memoir – Carole murders Fournier
1	08/02/2009	Psychiatrist's letter to Carole re Fournier
2	15/03/2009	Memoir – Fournier's body discovered
3	21/11/2008	Management memo to staff on internal works rules
4	16/03/2009	Memoir – Altercation with site manager over decision for no work break
5	20/02/2009	Psychiatrist's letter to Carole about Fournier's manager whom Fournier tried to strangle
6	16/03/2009	Memoir – Carole meets HR director
7	15/11/2008	Head office note to all staff, awarding site director 'Manager of the Year' accolade
8	16/03/2009	Memoir – consultation with Fournier's colleague, Sartis
9	27/02/2009	Psychiatrist's letter to Carole re effects of car park beatings on Soulier
10	16/03/2009	Memoir – Soulier in custody for Fournier's murder
11	23/02/2009	Medical examiner's report to Carole on Vasseur's suicide
12	17/03/2009	Memoir – consultation with Fournier's line manager
18	08/08/2008	Labour inspector's report on physical and verbal abuse by Exertier, a call-centre worker, on Carole in her surgery
43	18/03/2009	Carole tracked down by police
Epilogue	18/3/2009	Carole avoids arrest by taking own life

> [(She) was never more beautiful than on Wednesday 18 March 2009, around 8am, when Lieutenant Richard Revel's arms slid under her broken spine …][47]

Shortly before she dies, Carole distributes twenty copies of her evidence dossier to various public authorities, including the police, as well as to trade unions and journalists.[48] There may be a parallel here with the book Carole comes across in her apartment shortly after her first killing.[49] This is a collection of letters from philosopher Louis Althusser to his lover Franca Madonia.[50] Published posthumously, as he intended, this provides a powerful and lasting testimony to their relationship, much in the same way as Carole's written legacy.[51] It should also be noted that, like Carole, Althusser was a killer. He strangled his wife, Hélène, in 1980. Like her, he never stood trial. However, and this is where the comparison breaks down, he was subsequently confined for many years to a psychiatric ward.[52]

Louis-Julien Petit's 2016 film adaptation of this novel, entitled *Carole Matthieu*, provides a clear demonstration of the differences between literary and cinematic production and performance. While the novel's core narrative has been retained here, there is no narrator as such. Operating as the intermediary between the spectator and the story, the camera provides Carole's view of the world as she (the actor Isabelle Adjani) experiences the business operations and suffering around her at Melidem, an online retail business which uses high-pressure telephone sales tactics on its customers and relentlessly pushes its call-centre staff to sell more.[53] For instance, as the film opens, a call-centre supervisor shouts encouragingly (and brashly) to his team:

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[47] Ledun, *Les visages* (2011), p. 397.

[48] Ledun, *Les visages* (2011), p. 396.

[49] Ledun, *Les visages* (2011), p. 36.

[50] Louis Althusser, *Lettres à Franca: (1961–1973)* ed. by Yann Moulier Boutang and Francois Matheron (Paris: Stock/IMEC, 1998).

[51] Althusser, 1988, letter of 18/11/1963, pp. 486–487.

[52] German Arce Ross, L'homicide altruiste de Louis Althusser *Cliniques méditerranéennes* 2003/1 (nº 67) ERES 2003, pp. 222–238, <https://www.cairn.info/revue-cliniques-mediterraneennes-2003-1-page-222.htm> [accessed 01/03/2018].

[53] The casting of Adjani in this role seems oddly coincidental because she is the only actor mentioned in the novel where Carole's daughter, Vanessa, refers to the film, *La journée de la jupe*, in which Adjani also starred. Ledun, *Les visages* (2011), p. 326.

> 'On se logue! Vous êtes les putains fucking vendeurs! Allez les loulou! Qui sera le roi du jungle aujourd'hui?'
>
> [You're logging in! You're the fucking sales staff! Come on you blockheads! Who will be king of the jungle today?]

We see how an army of telesales and marketing staff, reading from prepared scripts, is driven hard to sell more goods and encourage consumer debt by a group of sharp-tongued supervisors who continuously listen in on call-centre conversations and are equally stressed themselves. The latter know that, if their assigned team fails to perform well – only an individual score of at least 4.5 out of 5 will do, their own jobs are at risk. Arguably, they are presented as the modern equivalent of Old Testament slave drivers whose task is to get the job done come what may.

Luc Boltanski and Ève Chiapello precisely encapsulate this culture when they describe the impact of technological innovation in the workplace:

> L'utilisation des nouvelles technologies est aussi une occasion d'accroître la pression sur les salariés: à catégorie socio-professionelle équivalente, le travailleur qui utilise l'informatique a un travail plus propre et physiquement moins pénible mais il subit plus la pression de la demande, surtout lorsqu'il est ouvrier ou employé.
>
> [Using new technologies also provides an opportunity to increase pressure on workers: for every type of job, those who use computers have cleaner and less physically harsh work, but they are more subject to demand pressures, whether they are manual or office workers.][54]

Carole Matthieu is not a subtle film. It has but a single message – that the needs of the organisation will always have primacy over those of individuals, even where they suffer continually. This view is reinforced by dramatic orchestral music throughout, as well as the recurring image of Carole's 'regard clinique', that somehow manages to be both beatific and despondent as she walks alone through the corridors of Melidem's impersonal, glass-faced building. When we first encounter her, she has been severely beaten by an employee under the influence of anti-depressants. Paradoxically, despite this incident, she believes him to be a victim of company high-pressure tactics and not an aggressor.

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[54] Boltanski and Chiapello, *Le nouvel ésprit*, p. 366.

The fictional experience at Melidem is reflected in recent recorded instances involving workers in environments where the telephone is key to operations. For instance, a 2009 article in the journal *L'Express* focussed on the challenges faced by State Employment Office staff ('les agents de Pôle emploi') who have to complete:

> '10 entretiens téléphoniques par heure, sachant qu'un entretien téléphonique a la même valeur en termes de résultats pour la direction qu'un entretien physique d'une demi-heure. C'est la logique des comptes!'
>
> [10 telephone interviews an hour, knowing that a telephone interview has the same value in terms of results for management as a half-hour face-to-face interview. This is the logic of accounting!][55]

As business writer Jean-Marie Gogue notes, this pressure is deliberately intensified by internal competition in many organisations, with bonuses for the 'plus performants' [highest performer*s*] and threats of downgrading or dismissal for the 'moins performants' [lowest performer].[56]

In this film, the organisation's HR director tells Carole that her job is restricted to ensuring employees are registered as fit for work, not to provide emotional support to depressed staff. Frustrated by her inability to change the prevailing culture of suffering and bullying, she decides to help a depressed employee commit suicide as the only way to get line management attention. In a strong parallel with the film *Corporate* analysed earlier, management denies any culpability, asserting, as argued already, that staff problems are rooted in their private lives, not work. Managers urge staff to return to work while the police investigate how the employee died. Meanwhile, union representatives cynically see the situation as one

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55 Emilie Lévêque, *Stress, Management par les chiffres, perte de sens … Des salariés de Pôle emploi témoignent* [online] <https://lexpansion.lexpress.fr/actualite-economique/>, publié le 02/11/2009.

56 Jean-Marie Gogue, *La Culture du Résultat* (Versailles: Association française Edwards Deming, 2008), p. 9.

with negotiating potential, where they can trade a commitment to return to work for increased bonus payments. Humanity does not come out of this very well. Carole interviews all the employees. As one of them reflects on their infantilisation by management:

> 'Comme on vous traite comme un gamin de cinq ans, quand … à chaque mot on vous fait un speech pour vous dire que ça ne vas pas. Je comprends quand on a gros sur la patate, on pête les plombs. On devient désagréable avec les autres.'
>
> [You get treated like a five year old, when … every word is a speech telling you that you're not OK. I understand when you have a lot on your plate, you can lose it. You get nasty with others.]

The labour inspectorate refuses to take action against management, while the worker the police suspect of the murder, hangs himself.

Management ostracises Carole for her compassion and recruits a spin-doctor to ensure the business returns to 'normality'. Finally, with an overwhelming sense of her own failure, Carole commits suicide in a grand gesture, in a room crowded with managers and employees. While the film presents the tale in a realistic manner, this final moment is captured by the camera with an accompanying music score in an almost operatic fashion as the spectator gazes down directly onto Carole's crumpled corpse, while hands surround and stretch out over her as if to capture her empathetic soul before it takes flight.

It remains to be seen whether, in practice, the occupational physician in France has a more nuanced position in an organisation than the one created by Ledun. For instance, the French 'Cour de cassation' recently ruled that the behaviour of an occupational doctor 'dans l'exercice de ses fonctions' does not of itself constitute a form of workplace bullying by the employer. In this particular case, the worker, who was on sick leave, objected to a management request for a medical check by the 'médecin du travail', as a precondition for returning to work.[57]

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[57] Arrêt de la Cour de cassation, chambre sociale, 30 juin 2015, n° 13-28201 [online] <http://www.editons-tissot.fr/droit-travail/livreblanc.aspx?comportement-du-medecindu-travail-et-harcelement-moral&TEL_ID=2669> [accessed 05/03/2018].

La question humaine

François Emmanuel's novel *La question humaine* raises the issue of how the skills of an in-house business psychologist are applied in support of the interests of a neoliberal organisation that run counter to the needs of its workforce. It is only when the psychologist is compelled to question the implications of his routine approach to work that he recognises the dubious ethical ground to which his career thus far has been tethered. As a consequence, he finds himself emotionally adrift in a world in which the certainties of both the quality of his professional skills and how they have been applied place him in a moral void. Significantly, the novel also draws parallels between neoliberal people management and the treatment of victims in Nazi Germany.

The bare plot of this short novel focuses on a self-assured, business psychologist who, we learn at its very end, is called Simon and who works in the HR department of the French subsidiary of a German production company, SC Farb.[58] This company has recently undergone a massive 'down-sizing' exercise with the departure of 40 per cent of its workers – using selection criteria devised by the psychologist. Now he is directly involved in implementing deliberately dehumanising management job selection and development practices.[59] The business's seemingly affable, deputy managing director, Karl Rose, orders the psychologist to investigate the mental state of his own boss, the tense and secretive managing director, Mathias Jüst. Both are Germans. This is the incident that triggers the plot of the novel. As the story unfolds, the reader is drawn inexorably towards the novel's main theme – the power of guilt to haunt and torture those who relive, in their minds, the heinous actions of their parents and their entire generation – even years after the events themselves. The psychologist's investigation focuses on the mystery surrounding Jüst's past. We learn that, during World War II, although only a boy at the time, Jüst became aware of his father's involvement, as a policeman, in delivering an industrial process for mass murder using specially converted trucks fitted with gas canisters, after which shattered, emaciated bodies of victims were dumped down mineshafts. Now, decades later, Jüst is suffering the mental trauma of guilt of being a child of the generation that committed these crimes and of having had a bullying father who aided and abetted such suffering. However, we also learn that his deputy, Rose, was equally involved, although he does not appear to suffer the same moral qualms as Jüst. Then there is Simon himself, who is shaken and ashamed, when he realises that the HR practices he has been proudly implementing, along with the disarming 'langue morte, neutre et technique' he employs, have their roots in the processes of human suffering developed, honed and enforced during the Holocaust under the programme euphemistically labelled 'Tiergarten 4', that is, 'Zoo 4' in English – a dark description specifically designed to ensure its unwilling participants were classed as sub-human.[60]

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[58] Emmanuel, *La question humaine* (2000), p. 104.

[59] Emmanuel, *La question humaine* (2000), p. 11.

The obscenities of the Holocaust have provided a continuing fascination and revulsion for cultural producers in equal measure.[61] Emmanuel's novel tackles the same broad subject matter, but rather than focussing on events from a purely historical perspective, it makes the link between the monstrous activities of the Third Reich, and how they have cast a long, odious, dark shadow over contemporary business practices, especially people management, in today's neoliberal era. This connection is not an original one, but the way Emmanuel engages with the topic, framed within the pages of a corporate thriller, is as innovative as it is disturbing.[62] This is one area of human history where the psychologically disturbing nature of a factual memoir, through its ability to present scale and detail, is likely to surpass the horror of any fictional representation.[63] It is interesting to note that both Emmanuel in this novel and Ledun in *Les visages écrasés* use reference documentation to support their plots. However, whereas Ledun uses purely imagined medical case studies (see the previous text), Emmanuel takes his reference material from actual Holocaust atrocities, for instance 'Tiergarten 4', which was a real Nazi killing programme.[64]

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[60] Emmanuel, *La question humaine* (2000), pp. 88 and 94.

[61] These include, among many others, Schenkkan's play, *Building the Wall*, in which a battle rages between truth and propoganda, as President Trump's war against illegal immigration leads stealthily and depressingly from the introduction of martial law to prison camps and death camps. Robert Schenkkan, *Building the Wall* (London: Oberon Books Ltd, 2018).

[62] Dejours, *Souffrance* (2014).

[63] See for instance, Elie Wiesel, *La Nuit* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 2007), Primo Levi, *Survival in Auschwitz* (New York: The Orion Press, 1959).

Meanwhile, Simon's job focuses on devising and running pressured workshops and role plays that aim to:

> pousser les hommes à dépasser leurs limites personnelles.
>
> [Push people beyond their personal limits].[65]

He knows he has achieved this aim only when he has traumatised participants to the extent that:

> des hommes d'âge mûr pleur[ent] comme les gamins,
>
> [mature people cry like kids],

so that subsequently he is able to meld them into:

> des soldats, des chevaliers d'entreprise, des subalternes compétitifs
>
> [soldiers, business knights, competitive subordinates].

The implication is, therefore, that it is not sufficient for them to compete against the outside market; they must also be eager to vie with one another to achieve more.[66] These revelations are particularly poignant because Simon is half Jewish.[67]

Simon relates the novel as a first-person memoir. However, it is the way the story is told – its narratology – rather than these details, that ensures it leaves a marked impression on the reader. The technique Emmanuel deploys is that of the thriller, where information is deliberately held back,

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[64] T4 Medical Killing Program [online] <http://remember.org/witness/wit-vic-med> [accessed 25/08/2018].

[65] Emmanuel, *La question humaine* (2000), p. 10.

[66] Emmanuel, *La question humaine* (2000), p. 10.

[67] Emmanuel, *La question humaine* (2000), p. 94.

Table 4. Approximate time periods in *La question humaine*

1940s	Mid-1970s	1990s
Era of atrocities Jüst and Rose young enough to recall Nazi atrocities in which their parents were accomplices.	*Broadly, period covered by novel/ start of neoliberal era* Simon's investigation. Rose in his 40s (p. 12). Simon runs brutal management workshops aimed at maximising performance (p. 9). Learns about senior management's past Nazi connections. Is subsequently dismissed for challenging management motives (pp. 99–100). Soon after, he secures new job in not-for-profit sector.	*Period when Simon's memoir actually written* Simon looks back at his career. He has now spent many years working in a home for autistic children 'aux marges du monde' [*at the edges of the world*], seen as a form of penitence for his past behaviour.

and as the reader's engagement with the narrative increases, the reader is compelled to wait for the gaps to be filled in. Thus, a distinction is often made between the *fabula*, the chronological order of the events through the story, and *sjuzhet*, how the story is actually told.[68] The novel also uses flashback (*analepsis*) that often includes the evidentiary written reference material revealed to Simon, as outlined earlier. So, the events the reader experiences are not always arranged as they actually occurred.[69] Broadly, the novel covers three time periods which interweave continuously across its 104 pages. This is illustrated in Table 4.

There is an important subsidiary theme here – the power of music to trigger intense memory. Early in the novel, Simon learns that Jüst and three others, all of whom he eventually interviews, formed a company musical group, the Quatuor Farb, in which its members often appeared to fight for individual supremacy rather than work in harmony – in fact, a reflection of SC Farb's competitive culture.[70][71] They were Jüst's PA and former lover, Lyn Sanderson, a chemist, Jacques Paolini and a former company salesman, who calls himself Arie Neumann. Jüst's wife, Lucy, explains to Simon how her husband, long haunted by death, heard a recording of Franz Schubert's melancholic string quartet no. 14, *La Jeune Fille et la Mort [Death and the Maiden]*, and shrieked for it to stop, shouting:

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[68] Vladimir Propp, *Morphology of the Folk Tale* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1968).

[69] See for instance, Gérard Genette, *Figures III* (Paris: Seuil, 1972).

[70] Emmanuel, *La question humaine* (2000), p. 20.

[71] Emmanuel, *La question humaine* (2000), p. 24.

> 'la musique des anges, voyez vous, ils sont ligués à dix, à vingt, pour me déchirer le corps …'
>
> [The music of the angels, you see, they lined up in tens, twenties, to rip my body to shreds …][72]

Then, at the very end of the novel, Simon attends a concert in a former baroque church in which Neumann plays the violin. As the haunting, frantic, opening chords of Arvo Pärt's piece, *Fratres*, is played, Simon undergoes a moment of revelation about his own existence and the full horror of the human capacity to brutalise others:

> 'Cet instant fut pour moi celui d'une désignation muette et bouleversante. Et quand, sur fond de bourdon continu, les premières notes prirent leur essor, je vis ce que je n'avais pas pu voir, ce que je n'avais pas voulu voir, ces images soudain trop nettes de l'ouverture de la porte métallique après le basculement de la traverse, la masse noire des corps, le monceau de cadavres mous, enchevêtrés …'
>
> [That moment was for me one of silent and overwhelming clarity. And when, against the background of the continuous hum, the first notes soared, I grasped what I had not been able to see, what I had not wanted to see, those suddenly too clear images of the opening of the metal door after the tilting of the crossbeam, the black mass of bodies, the pile of limp, entangled corpses …][73]

In the meantime, he begins to question his own working methods. At first, he relies only on the unemotional written technical information sent to him anonymously to understand the activities of the Nazis and how they strove to improve the mechanical efficiency of the gas equipment used to reduce 'le nombre des pièces …' imprisoned, struggling and suffocating to death in the converted trucks.[74] The unknown sender had also dispatched documentary information that describes the behaviour, required by the Nazi hierarchy, of the direct perpetrators of these war crimes, such as truck drivers and their assistants.[75] On hearing this music however, Simon suddenly stops intellectualising, and the genuine horror of these activities strikes him with uncontrollable emotional force for the first time. He experiences, in his mind's eye, what happened to the remains of the human cargo dumped as waste by the trucks. The juxtaposition of the power and beauty of music with the revulsion of the Holocaust here recalls the use of music played by concentration camp victims in Auschwitz and Birkenau as the Nazi's way of covering the screams from the gas chambers, while the musicians, fearful for their own continued existence, played on in the hope that this would secure their survival.[76]

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[72] Emmanuel, *La question humaine* (2000), p. 29.

[73] Emmanuel, *La question humaine* (2000), p. 102.

By the end of the novel the reader is left to assume that Jüst is under psychological care, while Rose, an inflexible product of the Nazi Lebensborn racial purity programme, remains in charge of SC Farb.[77] Meanwhile, Simon, the former cocky, manipulative and bullying business psychologist, has sought atonement for his previous behaviour and the shock of, unwittingly, being part of the activities of a progeny of the Nazi machine, by devoting the rest of his working life helping mentally handicapped children.

A critical examination of the film adaptation of this novel, also called *La question humaine*, shows that, although the core plot remains intact, it differs from the novel in part because much more time is spent in developing the character of the psychologist, here called Simon Kessler. Among other things, we see his manipulative interview technique and involvement in cruel management team exercises, including one in which a manager is encouraged by team-mates to jump from a small boat into the cold sea at night.[78] More significantly however, film-maker Nicholas Klotz fleshes out the character's personality, revealing to the spectator Kessler's hedonistic lifestyle, including womanising, excessive drinking of alcohol and drug-taking. It is almost as if he is leading a double life when compared to his calculated and controlled self at work. The fshop act that the film's main protagonist is portrayed as a social lowlife provides another dimension that is not evident in the novel, where Simon, the first-person narrator, focusses on describing the lives of others rather than himself. In the film, however, Klotz, the film-maker and storyteller, provides several vivid, contemporary illustrations of how today's workers can be viewed as socially estranged and compliant individuals. For instance, in one of the film's telling opening scenes, the camera lingers briefly on the backs of unspeaking, identically suited, male employees, presumably all work colleagues, each concurrently taking a natural break in a factory lavatory. These anonymised individuals standing in front of closely packed porcelain urinals resemble farm animals, each allocated a compact space in a coop or other enclosure. In addition, more is made in the film than the novel of the psychological turmoil generated by Kessler's experiences from the knowledge that he uncovers in his investigation. For instance, only in the film, do we witness the psychologist stumble along a dark street and crumple on the pavement, effectively wedging himself against a grimy office doorway after he has read a particularly disturbing piece of information sent to him about the Holocaust. It is as if he is one of the Holocaust victims, bundled into a truck, awaiting a singularly unpleasant fate.[79] There is also a scene in which Kessler sits naked and tormented in bed as he suffers devastating guilt, shame and remorse, and tries to come to terms with what he has learnt about the connection between psychological techniques fine-tuned by the Nazis and his own habitual manipulation of others using the techniques of modern occupational psychology.

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[74] Emmanuel, *La question humaine* (2000), p. 86.

[75] Emmanuel, *La question humaine* (2000), pp. 63–66.

[76] *Music and the Holocaust* [online] <http://holocaustmusic.ort.org> [accessed 16/08/2018].

[77] David Crossland, "Lebensborn Children Break Silence," *Spiegel.de*, 07/11/2006 [online] <http://www.spiegel.de/international/nazi-program-to-breed-master-race-lebensborn-children-break-silence-a-446978.html> [accessed 16/08/2018].

[78] Klotz, *La question humaine*, circa 0h54m.

On the other hand, both the novel and the film rely on the psychologist's voice to describe the contents of the documentation he receives, including copies of papers written in the 1940s. In the novel, Simon provides extracts from these documents as part of his memoir. In the film we see Kessler reading these documents, as actor Mathieu Amalric, playing the psychologist, provides the voice-over. It is interesting that Klotz has eschewed a more cinematic approach, by *not* providing dramatisations of the Holocaust scenes described in the documents. Perhaps he was concerned that such a representation would have trivialised the nature of the horrific subject matter here. However, instead of Simon attending a church concert, as he does at the end of the novel, the spectator witnesses something more akin to preparations for a mass execution. At the end of the film, with Simon's voice-over providing a litany of horrors drawn from what he has learnt, we see him join a long thin line of people crossing flat, bleak countryside on a path that leads to a large agricultural building. At another time, this could easily have been a gas chamber, and they would have been unwitting victims. In the film, however, like the church in the novel, it is merely a concert venue.[80]

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[79] Klotz, *La question humaine*, circa 1h37m.

Concluding comments

With reference especially to Foucault's theoretical work on discourse, this chapter has argued that clinical professionals contribute to the sometimes dark messaging within an organisation as part of what might be termed a 'community of friction' in which employers, workers and in-house therapists with different levels and forms of power continually struggle to reconcile their varying priorities in an environment where psychosocial stress is inevitable.

The narratives selected reveal how health practitioners can use their own position to step beyond the confines of their job description. In Carole's case she turns from counsellor to mercy killer; while Simon connives to manipulate employees' minds so that they push themselves continually to perform beyond their capabilities, including competing furiously with one another.

The chapter sought to demonstrate, through its analysis of critical texts and its examination of fictional storytelling, how the issue of medicalisation expands beyond the workplace to the consideration of the role of health professionals in society as a whole. This means that the issue is not simply one where neoliberal organisations are capable of wilfully using these individuals' skills to control workers. More significantly, the broad social concern that lies at the heart of this debate is that, despite or because of the efficacy with which contemporary society can dispense suitable drugs to diminish and dampen the impact of mental suffering on workers, the root problems, that is, impoverished work design and the aggressive nature of some people management, remain unchanged. Meanwhile, it seems plausible that workers suffering from psychosocial stress are made to feel shame and guilt in a society that has created over-dependence on drugs for a generation of individuals who have been told repeatedly by senior management that their 'aberrant' personalities make it difficult for them to 'fit into' the organisations that employ them.

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[80] Klotz, *La question humaine*, circa 2h5m onwards.

In addition, the stories critically analysed in this chapter provide contrasting perspectives on how medicalisation and psychologisation have impacted the neoliberal workplace in France and the sometimes-problematic position of the enterprise-based health professional. On the one hand, we have witnessed how, through drug and psychological therapies, organisations seek to gain influence over, and improve economic returns from, workers who are already suffering mental strain. Framing these stories within Foucault's notions of discourse allows audiences to observe the status that is conferred on such professionals so that they can be entrusted to take on delicate tasks, such as the investigation Rose assigns to Simon in *La question humaine*.[81] However, as these cultural representations illustrate, an individual's professional carapace can dissipate rapidly – in Simon's case this only really happens when he is dismissed summarily by Rose for alleged incompetence.[82]

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[81] Paul Hersey and Kenneth H. Blanchard, "Chapter 8: Situational Leadership," in *Management of Organizational Behavior* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1988, Fifth edition), pp. 167–201.

[82] Emmanuel, *La question humaine* (2000), pp. 99–100.

CHAPTER 6

Degrees of complicity: Co-workers as witnesses

DOUCE: N'est-ce pas Belle ? (Belle ne répond pas.) N'est-ce pas Belle ? Belle, une porte doit être ouverte ou fermée. Si tu ne veux plus faire partie de l'équipe, dis-le maintenant, au moins tout sera clair.

BLANCHE: On ne t'en voudra pas.

[DOUCE: Isn't that right, Belle ? [Belle doesn't answer.] OK, Belle ? Belle, a door has to be opened or closed. If you don't want to be part of the team, say so now, at least everything will be clear.]

[BLANCHE: We won't hold it against you.][1]

This chapter critically examines the argument that witnesses to workplace bullying play crucial and often nuanced roles that can influence both perpetrator and target actions and reactions in any given situation. It takes as its starting point an analysis of critical literature on witness behaviour in workplace bullying. This includes commentaries and studies by the French psychologists Christophe Dejours and Pascale Desrumaux, as well as the Belgian psychologists, Catherine Hellemans and Aurore De Vos.[2] At a general level, these studies contend that there is no such thing as a passive onlooker. When a witness, usually a co-worker, allows a bullying situation to play out without intervening, this is a form of engagement in itself. Silence is a key ingredient of complicity.

As Dejours maintains, in the neoliberal organisation with its focus on individual performance measurement, workers are pitched against each other in competition. There is often little sense of solidarity and this partly explains lack of witness intervention where bullying takes place:

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[1] Isabelle Sorente, *Hard copy*, revised, undated and unpublished electronic version, p. 30. All references in this book to *Hard copy* are to this script provided to me via email by the author in Pdf format on 19/04/2018. Originally published by Arles: Actes Sud-Papiers, 2001.

[2] Pascale Desrumaux, Harcèlement moral au travail, survictimation et problèmes du harceleur : quand les victimes sont jugées aussi responsables que leurs harceleurs, *Les Cahiers Internationaux de Psychologie Sociale*, 2007, N°73, pp. 61–73.

> La loyauté et la confiance s'étiolent et sont remplacées par la méfiance et la contrainte à surveiller le comportement des collègues, bientôt considérés comme des adversaires. Non seulement la coopération en pâtit, mais les relations de respect, de loyauté, de confiance, de prévenance, d'entraide … se disloquent.
>
> [Loyalty and trust shrivel away and are replaced by mistrust and the need to monitor the behaviour of colleagues, who are soon seen as enemies. Not only does cooperation suffer, but relationships based on respect, loyalty, trust, thoughtfulness, mutual support, … collapse.][3]

Secondly, this chapter seeks to assess the extent to which storytelling contributes to our understanding of witness behaviour by critically examining three fictional representations of bullying in which witnesses play an important role. Each of these stories supports the findings of critical literature that, in many specific bullying situations, there are more witnesses than individual bullying targets and perpetrators.[4] In the film *Trois huit*, spectators are enveloped in an industrial world of noise, heat and dust in a glass-bottle-making factory that becomes a key protagonist in this story.[5] This film focuses on a new team member who joins a night shift and is targeted, seemingly without motive, by a co-worker, while others look on with varying degrees of disengagement. For the most part the spectator, as an external witness, simply does not know whether management, which is generally absent, is aware of, or tolerates, the bullying. Next, the film *La loi du marché* also provides a narrative triggered by the arrival of a new worker. However, unlike *Trois huit*, where the main protagonist is a bullying target, in this second story the central character is a witness and a reluctant enforcement agent of the organisation's disciplinary and surveillance policies for workers and customers. Spectators see the working environment through the eyes of this individual, new to working in a hardware superstore as a security manager, as he seeks to come to terms with the organisational culture of systemic violence in which he has become part.[6] Then, in contrast to these two realistic stories, the play *Hard copy* exhibits elements of absurdity and surrealism. Here, the audience engages with a small team of workers in a clerical office who reveal themselves variously as bullies and witnesses as they circle around a target who is a long-standing team member. Roles sometimes shift back and forth because bullies, perhaps fearing they may become targets, morph into witnesses and bullies once again.[7] Thus, the audience experiences how witnesses collude with the principal bully to reinforce the latter's group status even where they assert to the target that they are neutral.

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[3] Christophe Dejours, La psychodynamique du travail face à l'évaluation: de la critique à la proposition, *Travailler*, 2011 /1 n° 25, p. 17 [online] <https://www.cairn.info/revue-travailler-2011-1-page-15.htm> [accessed 25/11/2019].

[4] Helen Cooper-Thomas and Tim Bentley et al., "The Impact of Bullying on Observers and Target," *New Zealand Journal of Human Resource Management*, 14, no. 2 (2014): pp. 82–95.

[5] Dir. Philippe Le Guay, *Trois huit*, Canal +, France 3 Cinéma, 2001.

A critical, multifaceted discourse

A 2018 overview of critical literature in this area points out that the direct study of witnesses as distinct parties in bullying situations is, for the most part, relatively recent.[8] Desrumaux, one of the main contributors to current research and thinking about witnesses to bullying, maintains that there are four sets of actors here, all of whom are engaged in their own discourse where the unstated is often more important than explicit messaging.[9] These issues are summarised in Figure 7.

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[6] Dir. Stéphane Brizé, *La loi du marché*, Arte France Cinéma, Nord-Ouest Films, 2015.

[7] Bullying within groups of workers has been variously termed 'mobbing' and lateral or horizontal violence by some researchers. This book retains the word 'bullying' because the English use of the word 'mobbing' is traditionally restricted to describe large-scale civil rioting i.e. mob activity. See also: Jennifer Becher and Constance Visovsky, "Horizontal Violence in Nursing," *Medsurg Nursing* 21, no. 4 (July–August 2012): pp. 210–232 [online] <https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Constance_Visovsky/publication/230831024_Horizontal_violence_in_nursing/links/57ac75b508ae7a6420c2e593.pdf> [accessed 04/07/2019].

[8] Mieneke Pouwelse, Roelie Mulder, and Eva Gemzøe Mikkelsen, "The Role of Witnesses in Workplace Bullying: An Overview of Theories and Empirical Research," in Premilla D'Cruz et al., eds, *Pathways of Job-related Negative Behaviour, Handbooks of Workplace Bullying, Emotional Abuse and Harassment 2* (Springer Nature Singapore Pte Ltd., 2018), pp. 1–37 [online] <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-10-6173-8_14-1> [accessed 02/08/2019].

This figure seeks to illustrate that the way a particular bullying incident is viewed depends on an actor's precise role that governs their perception of events. Each of these actors is, therefore, conceivably, complicit or made complicit in promoting a culture of workplace violence, while they continually influence one another by the way they act or fail to do so. For instance, the organisation, through its ongoing internal discourse about the need for compliance and ever-increasing performance levels, may encourage individuals with bullying tendencies and inhibit the reactions of witnesses and other colleagues who fear being targeted themselves. Meanwhile, stereotyping by individual perpetrators or the organisation as a whole, may transform certain individuals into targets – but not through anything they have actually done themselves.

According to Desrumaux, witnesses and other colleagues, influenced by an organisational culture of competition, sometimes mistakenly attribute culpability for a particular bullying situation to a target, in part because they naively believe in 'a just world' and this is why they remain silent.

Desrumaux posits that the 'just world' notion is based on a belief in an equitable and benevolent society where individuals (including bullies) are essentially 'good'. This world view also implies that once a target has been bullied any continued harassment is, subjectively, considered equitable. In the eyes of witnesses and other co-workers this makes the target more responsible for the bullying and the bully less so.[10][11] Then, where such

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[9] There are therefore some parallels to be drawn here with the analysis in the previous chapter that relied extensively on Michel Foucault's ideas about power relationships and competing discourses. However, in this instance the issue of medicalisation is not to the fore.

[10] Duncan Chappell and Vittorio Di Martino, *Violence at Work* (Geneva: ILO, 2006).

[11] Pascale Desrumaux, Harcèlement moral au travail, survictimation et problèmes du harceleur: quand les victimes sont jugées aussi responsables que leurs harceleurs, *Les Cahiers Internationaux de Psychologie Sociale*, 2007, N°73, pp. 61–73 [online] <https://www.cairn.info/revue-les-cahiers-internationaux-de-psychologie-sociale-2007-1-page-61.htm> [accessed 10/04/2020].

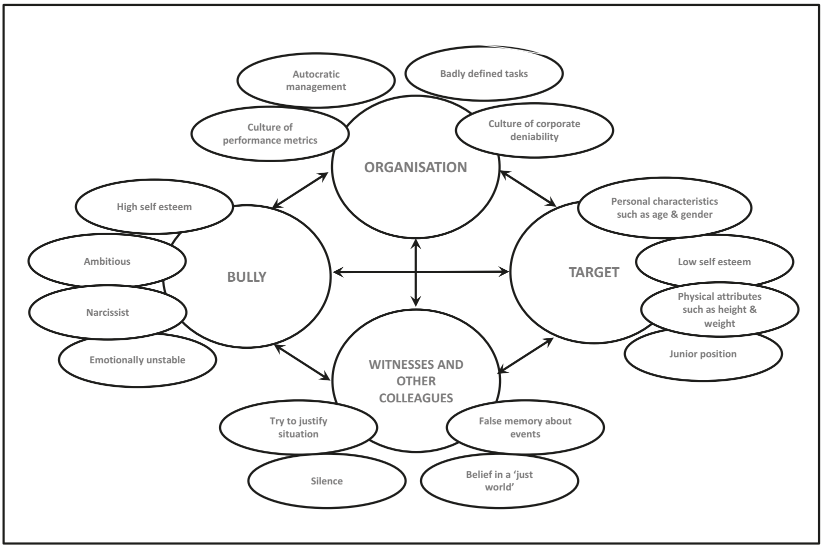
Autocratic management
Badly defined tasks
Culture of performance metrics
Culture of corporate deniability
ORGANISATION
High self esteem
Personal characteristics such as age & gender
Ambitious
BULLY
TARGET
Low self esteem
Narcissist
Physical attributes such as height & weight
Emotionally unstable
WITNESSES AND OTHER COLLEAGUES
Junior position
Try to justify situation
False memory about events
Silence
Belief in a 'just world'

Figure 7. Workplace bullying: a multidimensional discourse of overt and covert notions

Adapted from Pascale Desrumaux, Le harcèlement moral: l'enfer au travail, *Cerveau & Psycho, L'Essentiel* n° 8 novembre – janvier 2011–2012, p. 13 [online] <https://www.academia.edu/19779668/harcelement_moral_au_travail> [accessed 02/11/2019].

witnesses refrain from intervening in favour of a target, this latter becomes increasingly isolated. Witnesses may go even further by rationalising to themselves why they failed to act when the bullying occurred in the first place, so as to justify their ongoing collusion with the bully both to themselves and others.[12]

It seems likely that, in a world where social injustice has become routinised, resigning oneself to workplace suffering becomes the norm. This appears as true for witnesses as it is for targets. The individual witness may feel alone in an environment where individual reward incentives, coupled with weak unions at local level, have ensured the dissipation of any sense of group consciousness and class solidarity, as well as encouraging social isolation.[13]

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[12] Leon Festinger, *A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1957).

A recent Belgian study by psychologists, Catherine Hellemans and Aurore De Vos, provides further insights into the complexities of witness behaviour.[14] However, it also raises issues about how best to interpret qualitative survey responses where participants (in this case workers who had witnessed bullying incidents) appear to be inconsistent in terms of the views they express. These researchers scrutinised recorded interviews and questionnaire responses of witnesses to different bullying situations, in a single organisation with more than 100 workers and tried to understand why, broadly, witnesses to bullying remain passive.

Beyond lack of solidarity mentioned earlier, these authors maintain that witnesses' failure to act in support of targets sometimes results from a combination of factors, that is, a fundamental misunderstanding of the target's ability to resist, fear of being bullied oneself, the difficulty of defining particular isolated actions as bullying and the position power of the perpetrator. They also point out that the silence of witnesses may be encouraged by external factors, such as the threat of economic uncertainty and organisational cultural explanations, including ingrained acceptance of habitual, systemic violence.[15]

Researchers contacted potential participants via an independent specialist 'conseiller' within the organisation to whom they presented the study's objectives and methodology.[16] This individual then informed workers about the research and gave those who were interested the researchers' contact details. Ten such individuals volunteered to participate. They all confirmed that they had witnessed bullying by a line manager/supervisor of a subordinate. In total, four male and six female witness-participants were involved.

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[13] Lhuilier, *Placardisés* (2000).

[14] Catherine Hellemans and Aurore De Vos, Les temoins de harcèot reacted nlement moral au travail, silencieux? in eds Pascale Desrumaux, *Anne-Marie Vonthron, Sabine Pohl, Qualité de vie, risques et santé au travail* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2012), pp. 124–135.

[15] Cyril Tarquinio, Les violences au travail. In *Psychologie sociale de la violence*, ed. G. N. Fischer (Paris: Dunod, 2003), pp. 127–153.

[16] 'Conseillers en prévention aspects psychosociaux d'un service externe pour la prévention et la protection au travail' are required by law in Belgium in all organisations with at least fifty workers. *Service public fédéral Emploi, Travail et Concertation* sociale [online] <http://www.emploi.belgique.be/defaultTab.aspx?id=45956> [accessed 10/11/2019].

This research used two methods of data collection: semi-structured interviews with witness-participants, and a closed (i.e. yes/no) questionnaire completed by these individuals as a separate exercise. The interviews were divided into various sections, that is, a description of the situation witnessed, respondents' reactions as witnesses, including, as appropriate, doing nothing or providing 'support' and how they saw their position in relation to other witnesses.[17] Where participants decided *not* to react to the bullying they had witnessed, they were then asked to complete a short, closed questionnaire incorporating statements based on five reasons. There are clear discrepancies between interview and questionnaire survey responses. For instance, in the interviews, only one participant said that they had not reacted because the target had brought the situation on themselves. On the other hand, in the questionnaire survey, this number rose to seven. A further discrepancy was revealed in the number of respondents who agreed that bullying was part of the organisation's culture. In their interviews, none of the witness-participants agreed this was so. However, in the questionnaire survey, this number totalled six.

In addition, witness-participants were asked about how they *perceived* other workers (i.e. colleagues not participating in the study) had reacted when they had witnessed a situation the study participants themselves considered to be bullying. Clearly, such views may be considered as hearsay as they were not directly verified by the workers concerned. However, this indirect commentary does provide a greater understanding of the range of possible witness responses to an observed bullying situation. So, various witness-participants argued that some of their non-participating colleagues said that they had not recognised the situation as bullying, or considered it was none of their business. Meanwhile, others declared that had they intervened they would have feared becoming bullying targets themselves.[18]

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[17] 'Support' as discussed in the interviews is not defined in the published research summary. This would have been helpful as the notion of 'support' might have included a wide range of interventions – from a disapproving shrug to active engagement with the perpetrator. In any event, the word 'support' may well be open to different interpretations by witnesses, targets and bullies.

There were nine areas in all where the interview and questionnaire surveys included the same questions/statements. These all sought to understand why witness-participants failed to act. In five of these cases more respondents clearly agreed with the sentiments expressed, such as 'fear of job loss' when they appeared in written questionnaire survey responses rather than as interview questions. It is unclear why this was the case, given that all worker comments were recorded anonymously. We do not know how many witness-participants did not complete the questionnaire.

In any event, it seems plausible that a history of bullying in an organisation can leave an emotional scar on both targets and witnesses and this may precondition them to react in a particular way because witnesses to a bullying incident may remember not just what they saw but how they felt at the time. So, if asked to recall this situation in a face-to-face interview, they may be particularly nervous and respond in a way that demonstrates a fear that identifiable interview responses or associated body language will be leaked to the organisation, even though they have been told their comments would remain unattributable and therefore confidential.[19] Dejours stresses how such fear can amount to collusion that feeds off the general discontent in an organisation and breeds suspicion and exclusion:

> Tout cela aboutit à ce que la déloyauté s'insinue dans des milieux de travail qui fonctionnent relativement bien jusque-là. Les coups bas, la rétention des informations, les tuyaux pourris, les rumeurs, les gens qui surveillent les uns les autres, la confiance qui disparaît, la méfiance qui s'installe, c'est un climat humain qui a complètement changé.
>
> [All this leads to disloyalty that seeps into workplaces that, up to now, have been operating relatively well. Dirty tricks, information withheld, misleading intel, rumours, people watching each other, trust that disappears, mistrust that sets in, it's a human climate that has completely changed.][20]

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[18] Neither the total number of non-participating colleagues per bullying incident, nor their ratio against witness participants, is known.

[19] There is in fact no evidence of any disclosure here.

[20] Christophe Dejours, Travail: de l'état des lieux au remaniement des principes de l'intervention, *Connexions*, no. 94, 2010, p. 19 [online] <https://www.cairn.info/revue-connexions-2010-2-page-11.htm?contenu=resume> [accessed 15/11/2019].

This appears to be an area where more research would be welcome, including what 'support' for a target actually means.

In order to cast further light on the extent to which storytelling represents subjective experience in this area, Figure 8 links academic theories and ideas discussed by Hellemans and Desrumeaux and uses them to assess the degrees of witness complicity evidenced in the fiction analysed in this chapter.[21] These notions relate to numerous variables i.e.: belief in a 'just world'; a tendency for witnesses fundamentally to misunderstand a bully's motivation and the target's ability to protect themselves; the 'bystander effect', that is, whether the probability of a witness intervening on behalf of the target falls as the number of witnesses grow because individual responsibility has become more diffuse; how individual witness intervention on behalf of the target may occur for very different reasons, including altruism, desire to reduce one's own personal suffering, or improve one's relative social position; and how witness roles can vary on a spectrum, broadly from 'defender' to 'abdicator'.[22]

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[21] Catherine Hellemans, *Les comportements des collègues témoins de harcèlement moral au travail*, 2015 [online] <https://issuu.com/fgfffg/docs/mtahealth2015-lucas_tfe> [accessed 22/02/2020].

[22] Melvin J. Lerner and Carolyn C. H. Simmons, "Observer's Reaction to the 'Innocent Victim': Compassion or Rejection?" *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 4, no. 2 (1966): pp. 203–210 [online] <https://doi.org/10.1037/h0023562> [accessed 22/02/2020]. See also: Lee Ross, "The Intuitive Psychologist and His Shortcomings: Distortions in the Attribution Process," *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology* 10 (1977): pp. ii–x, 1–341 [online] <https://www.roffle.net/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/235413325_The_Intuitive_Psychologist_And_His_Shortcomings_Distortions_in_the_Attribution_Process> [accessed 23/02/2020], Bibb Latane and John M. Darley, "Group Inhibition of Bystander Intervention in Emergencies," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 10, no. 3 (1968): pp. 215–221 [online] <https://doi.org/10.1037/h0026570> [accessed 23/02/2020], Lynn Bowes-Sperry and Anne M. O'Leary-Kelly, "To Act or Not to Act: The Dilemma Faced by Sexual Harassment Observers," *The Academy of Management Review* 30 no. 2 (2005): pp. 288–306 <https://doi.org/10.2307/20159120> and Megan Paull, Maryam Omari, Peter Standen, "When Is a Bystander Not a Bystander? A Typology of the Roles of Bystanders in Workplace Bullying," *Asia Pacific Journal of Human Resources* 50, no. 3 (2012): pp. 351–366 [online]<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1744-7941.2012.00027.x> [accessed 24/02/2020].

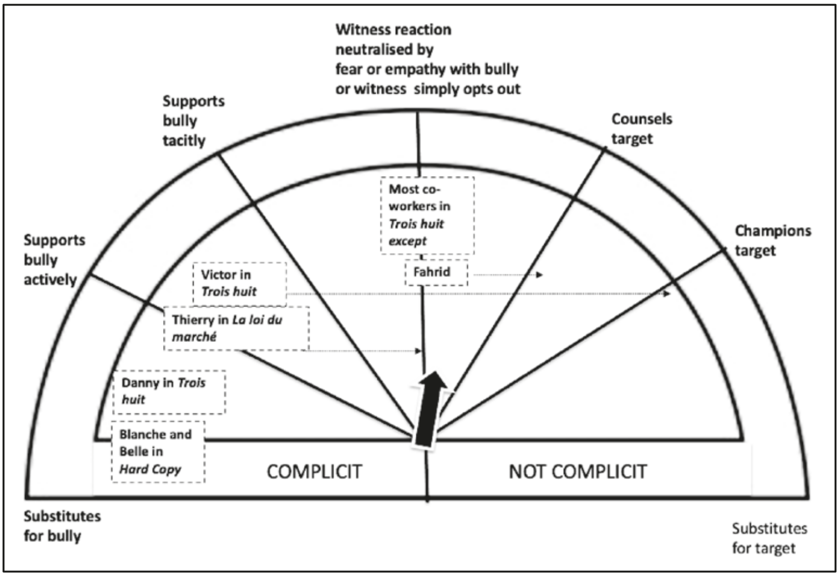
Witness reaction neutralised by fear or empathy with bully or witness simply opts out
Supports bully tacitly
Counsels target
Supports bully actively
Champions target
Most co-workers in *Trois huit* except
Fahrid
Victor in *Trois huit*
Thierry in *La loi du marché*
Danny in *Trois huit*
Blanche and Belle in *Hard Copy*
COMPLICIT
NOT COMPLICIT
Substitutes for bully
Substitutes for target

Figure 8. The witness complicity gauge

In this figure the outer band sets out a range of roles that may be adopted by witnesses in specific cases, from demonstrably supporting the bully through substitution, at one extreme, to taking a similar stance on the target's behalf at the other end of the scale. The heart of the diagram illustrates whether certain witnesses, during the course of each story, establish a fixed position or whether their degree of complicity with the bully changes during the story in question. This synthesis clearly demonstrates that, in these stories, witnesses shift their initial position in three instances. The biggest jump is made by Pierre's young son, Victor, in the film *Trois hui*t. He initially misjudges his father's inability to respond effectively to Fred's psychological and physical aggression, because Victor is captivated by Fred's charm. Then, when Victor realises what is happening he literally saves his father's life. On the other hand, most of Pierre's shift-work mates, even when they see what's happening, remain genial towards him but decline to get involved, perhaps thinking that someone else will come forward or Fred will also target them. In practice, only a single colleague, Farhid, is prepared to give Pierre advice, but that is all. In the final analysis, Pierre must rely on his wife and son to extricate him. In the film, *La loi du marché*, security manager, Thierry, once he recognises the disciplinary nature of the role he has been employed to carry out, moves from being an enforcer of company policy to opting out, as he is subjectively isolated and sees no possibility of remaining in his current employment given the suffering this is causing co-workers, customers and himself. However, one assumes that corporate policies on monitoring and enforcement continue unabated after Thierry quits. Meanwhile, in the play, *Hard copy*, Blanche and Belle, protect their own positions by steadfastly aligning themselves with the principal bully, Douce, and so perpetrate various acts of brutality against co-worker, Rose, that protect them both from bullying by Douce. All three stories are now critically examined in detail in the forthcoming text.

Trois huit

The 2001 film *Trois huit* is one of the few stories about workplace bullying which provides a tangible sense of physical tasks carried out by workers. This is because, rather than an anonymous white-collar office environment where the work is to varying degrees administrative and intellectual, the jobs portrayed here all involve production-line work which is very visible. Furthermore, the spectator is presented with a factory that is more than just a facsimile of actuality. It is a genuine Saint Gobain bottle-making plant, with blazing kilns and thousands of newly blown, white-hot, glass containers, continuously clattering on a conveyor belt across the screen, or heard in the background throughout many of the film's factory sequences. The key message of this film, from a witness perspective, is that ignoring bullying of colleagues is tantamount to approving of it. There is no substitute for bringing it to a halt, even if this means exposing oneself to violence. Further, it is easier to hide behind the bully than face them, even if this means participating in bullying behaviour.[23]

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[23] Le Guay, *Trois huit*, 29m–31m.

The plot focuses on somewhat ingenuous Pierre who switches from the day to the night shift at the factory where he meets another team member, Fred, who constantly bullies him and increasingly erodes his confidence. The film shows the real power of the story format to explain and examine the complex issues of: how difficult it is for a target to respond adequately to psychological bullying; how others in a work team collude sometimes unwittingly to enable the bullying to continue; how such behaviour at work can affect home life; and how psychological violence can escalate into physical bullying.[24]

While, one co-worker, Danny, acts as a fairly ineffectual follower to Fred, most of Pierre's colleagues remain silent and inactive until they are faced with Fred's violent behaviour and their own shame.[25] In the meantime, spectators see the target resist by first seeking to befriend the bully, including lending him money, and then in desperation, following repeated iniquities, resorting to violence. There are several key scenes across the action of the film in which the spectator experiences the triangular relationships between the bully, his target and witnesses. Some of these are set out in Table 5.

At the outset, the film shows, in support of Marie-France Hirigoyen's analysis, that workplace bullying comprises a series of often small events that, when taken together, place the target at a consistent disadvantage and their own repeated attempts to ameliorate the situation can fail through no fault of their own.[26] However, in this instance, the bully progresses from exerting psychological pressure, involving practical jokes and teasing, to outright physical violence in a process of escalation that, in retrospect, seems inevitable. Thus, we witness the behaviour of someone who neither desires, nor is capable of, controlling his negative behaviour towards others. In Hirigoyen's words, Fred is one of the world's:

> … pervers narcissiques … considérées comme des psychotiques sans symptômes, qui trouvent leur équilibre en déchargeant sur un autre la douleur qu'il ne ressentent pas et les contradictions internes qu'ils refusent de percevoir.

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[24] Le Guay, *Trois huit*, 26m.

[25] Le Guay, *Trois huit*, 7m.

[26] Marie-France Hirigoyen, *Le harcèlement*, p. 15.

Table 5. Analysis of key scenes involving witnesses in the film *Trois huit*

Position	Description	Witness behaviour
4–5m	Fred rebukes Pierre when P rips down female porn photos from inside P’s new locker. F’s close proximity to P is menacing and P is clearly uncomfortable. F is physically bigger than P.	Team-mates look on in silence. Subsequently one tells Pierre to ignore Fred as he always behaves this way.
6m40s–7m40s	F enlists co-worker, Danny, in a practical joke on P. F puts ‘friendly’ arm around P and slowly walks him under gantry. D pours bucket of water over P who is soaked. D and F laugh.	Two other team-mates see what Fred is organising, clearly disapprove but do nothing to stop it.
16m–16m50s	F, with D in train, convinces P to clean up shower room that F has left dirty, saying a cleaner is not available.	D laughs about what they’ve done. Cleaner arrives. D tells her she has a new female helper.
19m25s–20m30s	Mealtime with team eating own food. F relates cleaning story, saying P would make a good cleaning woman. P says he hadn’t minded. He’d cleaned often when his mother was ill.	Friendly atmosphere among team-mates, but F sullen and D make jokes that fall flat.
23m–24m40s	Another team mealtime. P has provided food. F glowers through window at P’s easy ability to make friends. Refuses to join in and leaves	Friendly, relaxed, atmosphere among workmates.
29m24s –31m	Supermarket shopping: P’s 12-year-old son, Victor, watches as P encounters F who deliberately and ‘jokingly’ pushes pack of soft cheese into P’s face.	Close up: spectators see V understands, from behaviour he witnesses across the supermarket, F’s underlying aggression.

(*continued*)

Table 5. Continued

Position	Description	Witness behaviour
33m30s–34m10s	Team members taunt P as they throw his shoe around the shop floor while he urges them to return it.	F, as witness, in a friendly gesture, gives shoe back to Pierre. Co-worker, Fahrid, advises Pierre that he and his wife are made fun of by the team and he shouldn't stand for it.
35m–36m20s	Mealtime. F tells P he's hungry and P should have made him some food. F grabs P's meal. When P tries to get the food back, F pushes container in his face. F is rebuked by supervisor.	First time team sees level of F's aggression to P. But when P says he will complain to management if bullying doesn't stop, team dissuade him. Members argue that solidarity comes first.
38m–4m50s	Team-mates agree to help P lay cement floor in his new house. P first refuses F's involvement then gives in.	Whole team during lunch break in nearby field discuss worker solidarity. F says it's never existed.
1h14m–1h15m	P's wife, Carole, concerned about his mental state, meets him in factory car park at end of shift. F approaches on motorbike.	P watches as C blocks F's crude attempts to engage her in conversation. She declares they are going to a hotel to make love, as they haven't seen one another for ages. F is effectively silenced.
1h 9m–1h19m	P reluctantly reveals burnt hand and bruises from F's beating to C. Flashback: P deliberately place hand on scorching glass bottle on production line while F looks on.	Two co-workers try to stop P but fail. They then help him recover.

Table 5. Continued

Position	Description	Witness behaviour
1h25m	Following violent fight in wood between P and F, when P was effectively spared only because of V's arrival, we see Yvan, a new recruit, has replaced F at work.	Supervisor covers for F and tells Yvan that he left for family reasons
1h26–1.29m	P, workmates and friends celebrate completion of P's new house with a barbeque. Fred arrives on motorbike.	Everyone watches as Victor approaches F who gives V a packet he then hands to his father. P speaks to F who explains it's part of the money he owes him and the rest will be repaid. F refuses P's invite to join them. Supervisor reflects on P's enduring ability to see the best in F.

> [… narcissistic perverts … considered as psychotics without symptoms, who get personal satisfaction by unburdening on others the pain they don't feel and the internal contradictions they refuse to understand].[27]

The bulk of the witnesses in this story are Pierre's workmates. However, they also include Pierre's 12-year-old son Victor, and finally, his wife, Carole. Across all these scenes the spectator observes how witnesses react to Fred's antics. At first his workmates shrug off Fred's behaviour and tolerate it. However, while they do not witness the worst of Fred's bullying of Pierre (which he carries out when they are alone), or see how he lies to Pierre to gain his sympathy and extract money from him, the team gradually recognises the aggressive nature of Fred's behaviour and the depth of Pierre's suffering – which, spectators eventually learn, extends to self-harm. It is unclear why Pierre's workmates demonstrate such complacency. Perhaps they believe in Desrumaux's 'just world' philosophy and so expect that the issue will eventually be resolved internally with no outside support from management. Even Pierre may believe this to the extent that he declines to go to the police following a violent brawl in which Fred almost kills him. Witnesses might also be afraid of becoming targets themselves because Fred's behaviour does not appear a surprise to them. However, their continued silence, whether overt collusion or not, is much the worse solution for Pierre as it covertly sanctions Fred's behaviour and contributes greatly to a brawl between Pierre and the much physically stronger and larger Fred that Pierre cannot win.

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[27] Hirigoyen, *Le harcèlement*, p. 127.

Pierre's son Victor initially falls under Fred's charismatic spell and, for a time at least, disowns his father, whose attitude towards Fred seems to him inexplicable. For a time, Victor only sees Fred's charm, but not his envy of his father on two counts: Victor's mother, Carole, has a successful management career; while his father, Pierre, is building a new house. On the other hand, Fred lives alone in an apartment and claims he is short of cash. It is only when Carole learns of these problems – initially from Victor and not from Pierre himself – that Pierre is forced to open up and show the extent of his physical wounds. She has already witnessed some of his mental suffering through his uncharacteristic truculent behaviour at home which threatens their family.[28] Carole is really the only person who engages directly and successfully with Fred on behalf of Pierre. She effectively silences Fred with her candour and resilience in the face of his clumsy, sexual repartee when the three meet fleetingly in the factory car park.

The final scene, in which there is a barbeque with all the co-workers and friends to celebrate completion of the house that Pierre has largely built by himself, is briefly marred by the return of Fred who we assume has been sacked. Fred gives Pierre back some of the money that he owes him; while Pierre, characteristically open and friendly, urges Fred to stay. Fred declines, drives off on his motorbike and we are left with the feeling that Pierre will always see the best in people, whatever suffering they cause him. However, this 'happy ending' is to some extent unsatisfactory. It glosses over a key issue, that is, whether any team member can rely on the active support of their workmates should a similar situation arise again in the future. There is also the sense that Pierre is perhaps impossibly naive to believe that there is good in all people and this will always come to the fore. Moreover, it may well be that Fred has departed only to cause suffering elsewhere.

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[28] Le Guay, *Trois huit*, 1h21m.

La loi du marché

Unlike the other two stories critically analysed in this chapter, Brizé's film focuses neither on a bully nor a target, but on a single witness, Thierry. The film therefore sees as central the pressures on a witness to systemic violence who is coerced by an organisation to comply with its brutal norms of behaviour but, simultaneously, acknowledges the unjust and untenable nature of the position in which he finds himself as an unwilling observer and even accomplice, because of his need for an income. Actor Vincent Lindon, in his 50s, with careworn features, balding, hangdog moustache and intelligent gaze, demonstrates clearly the internal struggle of a middle-aged man who seeks desperately to find a new job, only to come to the realisation that the work he is eventually hired to carry out is not compatible with his own sense of justice and morality. Thus, in this story, it is the organisational culture that often appears as the bully, not a specific individual, because of the rigid way it enforces standards of behaviour from customers and workers and diverts accountability to third parties, such as Thierry. Lindon is in every scene of the film and there is a simplicity and truth about his performance that provokes empathy at all times.

Brizé uses an entirely naturalistic style throughout the film by deploying a handheld camera that gives the film a *cinéma vérité*, 'fly-on-the-wall' documentary feel. He also minimises the length of scenes by cutting out anything that is non-essential. Thus, Thierry's interview for the job he secures is not filmed. We just see him start his first day; the rest is understood.

The first third of the film focuses on Thierry's frustrations and continued failure to find work after having been made redundant along with 700 other colleagues. Rather than fight for reinstatement, as some of these former colleagues want, he sees no alternative but to move forward. He is already struggling financially with a wife, Karine, and a seriously disabled teenage son, Matthieu, who suffers from cerebral palsy, to support. The family scenes throughout the film display a loving, supportive environment; the only time that Thierry seems to get any pleasure from life is when he and his wife are at a dancing lesson, and then practice at home as their physically ungainly son participates. Domestic life is a challenge and the spectator, the external witness, watches as Thierry routinely showers his son and dresses him for school.

The film begins with Thierry in discussion with a job-centre employee about the frustrations of continually being offered State-supported on-the-job training courses which, once the State support runs out, never materialise into job offers from the employers concerned. There are strong parallels here with Ken Loach's English-language film, *I, Daniel Blake*, where an ageing job seeker is desperate for a job and finds himself repeatedly embroiled in a Kafkaesque, unfeeling State system with limited benefits and individual support.[29] As with Loach, Brizé appears to work using only an outline script or a set of objectives for each scene. As he has pointed out, Lindon was the only professional member of cast, the rest were amateurs, drawn from job roles they played in the film.[30] In this way they could act truthfully and this influenced the way that Lindon applied his acting skills to the situations Thierry has to face. Such was the case, for instance, with the job-centre advisor Thierry encounters at the beginning of the film. Both Brizé's Thierry and Loach's Daniel are exasperated by the inflexibility of a system that appears deliberately designed to fail the individual. Even where Thierry secures a Skype interview early in the film, we see that the recruiter is only going through the motions. The interviewer criticises Thierry for the quality of his CV and, after a lengthy series of questions, tells him that there is in fact 'très peu de chance' that the job will be offered to him.

Around forty minutes into film, we see Thierry donning a shirt, tie and jacket and clutching a walkie-talkie on his first day as a security guard for a hypermarket. The spectator is encouraged to think that Thierry's luck is on the turn. He and his wife will not need to dispose of their main home – an apartment on which they have just five years of mortgage repayments left to make; or to sell their mobile home (the subject of a failed negotiation with another couple who refuse to pay the price demanded). However, this relief is short-lived as Thierry experiences the reality of the job which focuses on either monitoring and recording customer and staff behaviour through eighty closed circuit TV cameras positioned across the store or observing such behaviours directly by walking the floor of the hypermarket. Thierry's first experience of the stress of the job comes when a customer, witnessed pocketing a mobile phone charger, is brought into the security office for interview with a colleague who then takes the lead in the subsequent interrogation. Thierry looks on as the customer first denies then, under duress, admits the theft and narrowly escapes legal prosecution because he pays for the stolen goods.[31] Thierry also observes a retirement party for Gisèle, a check-out worker with some twenty years' service. Brizé perfectly captures the awkwardness of such situations, where the store manager gives a hastily prepared speech and then admits he hardly knows the departing employee. Gisèle beams in silence as her close team-mates raggedly chant a ditty they have composed for the event. The camera lingers repeatedly on Thierry throughout this scene as he looks on patiently at this group ritual. Overall, this is reminiscent of the formal award ceremony in Lydie Salvayre's novel, *La Médaille [The Medal]*, where workers and management seem to communicate using different languages.[32]

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[29] *I, Daniel Blake*, Ken Loach, 2016, BBC, France 2, BFI and others.

[30] Interview with Stéphane Brizé included on DVD of the English subtitled version of the film (translated as *The Measure of a Man*) Nord Ouest, 2015.

As Thierry becomes more experienced, rather than merely observing, he runs the interview sessions where customers are accused of theft. Notably, we see him take the lead with a male customer who is faced with a police prosecution unless he pays for two packs of meat he has attempted to steal. As this customer does not have the means to pay it is clear that the business will report the crime to the police. Brizé leaves it to the spectator to decide whether legal proceedings are appropriate for the theft of goods valued at €15.75.[33]

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[31] Le Guay, *Trois huit*, 1h21m40s.

[32] Lydie Salvayre, *La médaille* (Paris: Points, 2004).

[33] Brizé, *La loi*, 58m.

Further, Thierry witnesses the investigation and summary dismissal of Mme Anselmi, a check-out operator with a twenty-year service record, who has been filmed pocketing discount vouchers from a customer transaction, rather than tearing them up and throwing them in a bin. She has no room for manoeuvre here because the company specifically prohibits such behaviour. The store manager, who leads the discussion with Thierry as a witness, argues that this is not a first offence, that she is effectively stealing her colleagues' future bonuses, and that there has been a total breach of trust.[34] In neither of these two cases does anyone question or explain why these offences took place.

A few scenes after Mme Anselmi's dismissal, we see the workforce assemble in an unscheduled meeting organised by the store manager in which the Group HR director explains that she returned to the premises and committed suicide there. The director then spends a seemingly inordinate amount of time placing the responsibility for this tragic event on Mme Anselmi herself, declaring that the suicide came as a consequence of family pressures. Her son has a drug problem and she was in financial difficulties. Clearly there are strong parallels here with the film *Corporate*, (see Chapter 2) as both organisations feature cultures of systemic violence coupled with management deniability for a suicide. The HR director declares repeatedly that Mme Anselmi's difficulties did not reside with her work colleagues so they should not feel guilty that they are complicit in any way. He does not even mention the fact that the death followed the company's decision to dismiss her, or that the dismissal, coincidentally, supported corporate policy to reduce check-out staff numbers for financial reasons.[35]

The behaviour of the HR director here, as an intermediary for delivering sometimes distasteful company messages, echoes the critical observations of the HR role in the analysis of the film *Corporat*e in Chapter 2. It also recalls writer and poet Jérome Mauche's wry observation that:

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[34] Brizé, *La loi*, 1h5m.

[35] Brizé, *La loi*, 1h11m and 53m.

> Le DRH tente, il est vrai, d'évacuer en lui l'être humain, encore que son cauchemar, jusque dans son sommeil du juste, vient, lui gratte la voûte plantaire particulièrement chatouilleuse dans la profession et les diverses branches.
>
> [The HR Director tries, it is true, to evacuate the human being within himself, although nightmares, even in his sleep of the righteous, rise up, nibbling the arch of his foot, which is particularly ticklish in this profession and across various sectors.][36]

In this key scene where workers are informed of the suicide, the camera pans regularly back to Thierry. He is perhaps thinking that Mme Anselmi's position is broadly analogous to his own, with a disabled son and tight finances. However, there is another issue here, that is, that individuals are sometimes required to work in working environments, where they feel that they have little or no control over the pace of their work. This is true for both check-out operators and call handlers where work tempo is externally driven by a mix of customer demand and digitalised performance measurement processes.[37]

It seems clear here that Brizé's message is to accuse society, not just business, of indifference and complicity towards, if not support of, individual suffering through negative policies that habitually condemn individuals for their actions, rather than first neutrally investigating the cause of 'irregular' behaviours – such as pilfering – and then offer support if considered appropriate. In the case of Mme Anselmi, the clear message for the spectator is that the neoliberal organisation considers that it has no responsibility for the deleterious effects of its actions on individuals who are unable to cope with the combined pressures of working and domestic life; and that the organisation's duty is only to consider disciplinary actions and consequences from its own narrow economic perspective.

The subsequent funeral service that the store manager attends is witnessed entirely from Thierry's viewpoint so that the spectator sees his complicity as a witness in a tragedy in which he plays but a minor part. The camera lingers on Thierry's face, in various levels of close up, as the organ plays in the background, and the coffin carried by its bearers passes before him, an unfocussed blur.

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[36] Jérome Mauche, *La loi des rendements décroissants* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2007), p. 89.

[37] Anna Sam, *Les Tribulations d'une Caissière* (Paris: Le Livre de Poche, 2009).

In the final ten minutes of the film, we see Thierry having to deal with another check-out worker – this time one who has used her company loyalty card against a customer transaction so that she could acquire points unlawfully. We then see Thierry struggling with his conscience as he walks downcast outside the hypermarket and sits holding his head in his hand. If he continues with this security role, the pattern of his future working life is clear. It will comprise a daily routine of observing customers and staff and punishing them according to company policy. Despite substantial domestic challenges, including an unending battle to ensure his disabled son receives special care, and the need to repay a loan, recently negotiated with the bank, in order to buy a second-hand car, Thierry decides to address his personal moral dilemma by spontaneously leaving an employee disciplinary meeting in mid-session. He grabs his donkey jacket from his locker and quits the hypermarket for good. He may not have the power to defend others against a bullying organisation but he does have the ability to assert his own moral integrity, regardless of the consequences for himself, his wife and their son. This is not an entirely bleak conclusion, however. The spectator knows that Thierry has already overcome enormous challenges in his family life and that his relationships with his close family are solid. So, while his decision to quit without any warning seems ill-considered, from his personal moral standpoint it does appear appropriate. He and they will survive.

Hard copy

In sharp contrast to the realistic worlds of these two films, Isabelle Sorente's one-act stage drama, *Hard copy*, plays out in the confined space of a small office with minimal intrusion from the outside world – and where the ever-present lead bully and her two complicit team-mates act as witnesses and participants in the suffering of the target. This is a challenging, often exaggerated, piece and it is unclear whether Sorente is seeking to make a general statement about how she believes groups of women at work or elsewhere – say in a club or family setting – behave. Either way, Sorente presents these protagonists as stereotypes, that is, sexist caricatures, although not entirely without depth.

The play explores the nature of group bullying or 'mobbing' in a closed environment and how power can move back and forth within that group over time so that, in particular, witnesses can and do perpetrate violence themselves.

The preference for indirect methods of aggression is reflected throughout most of *Hard copy*, which focuses on body shaming and exclusion. However, the play does end in an horrific example of physical violence and this transition is sudden and not entirely convincing.[38]

When the play opens, Sorente lures the audience into the belief that the four female characters are very similar. They are each married with a teenage boy and a younger daughter. They each share interests in keeping fit, dieting, make-up, hair and fashion. They have each worked together for years, doing the same repetitive, monotonous administrative work. This tedium explains why, as a distraction, they play games, including where they pretend to write to an agony aunt from a women's magazine and improvise aloud her imagined replies.

However, the audience soon learns that these similarities are merely superficial. Douce has problems consummating her marriage in which her husband steadfastly adheres to his own formula for lovemaking:

> … [Il] bande. Il crache sur ses doigts. En fait que je sois excitée ou pas, il s'en fout Jean-Marc, il a sa technique. Pour lui, ça va.
>
> [… (He) gets hard. He spits on his fingers. Whether I'm aroused or not, Jean-Marc doesn't give a damn, he's got his technique. He's OK].[39]

Meanwhile, Belle appears obsessed with remaining young and attractive and talks repeatedly about sex – to the extent that she relates an elaborate story about her weekend when she allegedly surrendered her body to a group of homeless men on behalf of a local church support association:

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[38] As already stated in the Introduction, while gender and equality issues are clearly important in some bullying cases, they are largely beyond the narrow scope of this particular thesis.

[39] Sorente, *Hard copy*, p. 38.

> J'avais huit vagabonds à secourir. À la fin de la journée le temps pressait, il était dix-huit heures, il fallait que je rentre préparer le dîner, alors j'ai aimé les trois derniers en même temps.
>
> [I had to give relief to eight tramps. I was really pushed by the end of the day. It was six o'clock. I had to get home to prepare dinner, so I made love to the last three at the same time. It wasn't my fault. But I still feel guilty.][40]

At this early stage in the play, the audience does not know the characters well enough to grasp whether this story is meant to be true or an elaborate joke. However, the audience soon recognises, in the light of Belle's behaviour throughout the play, that this is all, most likely, part of the imaginative game playing by the group.

Blanche, on the other hand, has a problem with her weight:

> Le problème c'est que j'en mange trop. J'en mange un, j'en mange deux, et j'ai mangé toute la boîte. Après je me trouve grosse, je me trouve moche. Je me dis: 'Tu es encore plus moche et encore plus grosse qu'avant'. Salaud de corps.
>
> [The problem is that I eat too many. I eat one, I eat two, and I've eaten the whole box. Then I think I'm fat, I think I'm ugly. I say to myself: 'You're even uglier and fatter than before'. Bloody body.][41]

Finally, Rose suffers from being the butt of her colleagues continuing and increasingly savage 'jokes', while the audience learns that at home she is at odds with a controlling husband.

It soon transpires that there is a clear pecking order within the group. Rose demonstrates from the start that she is probably the weakest in terms of her ability to defend herself against criticism and other bullying antics, whereas Douce holds most of the power. She repeatedly exercises this by encouraging Blanche and Belle, who at times, through Douce's menacing attitude, facilitate and lead the bullying with varying degrees of gusto.

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[40] Sorente, *Hard copy*, p. 8.

[41] Sorente, *Hard copy*, p. 10.

There are several reasons that appear to trigger Rose's bullying. First, the audience is encouraged to believe that the trigger is Rose's comment that to be successful in all areas of life, the modern woman must be:

> la maman et la putain.
>
> [both mummy and whore].[42]

This reference to a 1973 film provides overt justification for sparking Douce's hostility towards Rose. Douce says she finds this comment vulgar. However, it is no more so than much of the other office conversations about sex.

The audience also learns that Douce's reaction has ignited the memory of her sexual abuse at the hands of a group of scouts when she was a girl. This horrifying incident is referred to at various times throughout the play, but the audience only learns the detail towards the end. In addition, the audience discovers late in the play that management is seeking to reduce the team's number from four to three for economic reasons. Blanche confesses to having been told this in confidence by their line manager before the start of the play. When she eventually shares this news openly with the team, it seems perfectly possible that Blanche has already given this information to Douce in advance, that is, before the curtain rose on the drama. After all, Douce appears particularly close to Blanche from the outset. Among other things, she is the only colleague she endearingly calls 'ma biche' ['my darling']. This could mean that the entire bullying incident, which clearly appears unexpected and out of character to Rose, was a ruse to ensure she was targeted for dismissal.[43]

Rose is mocked and shamed throughout the play. She is accused of: always being late; having bad taste in her choice of dietary products; wearing cheap clothes; having dandruff; smelling badly; and wearing a blouse that clashes with her skirt, even though this attire appears to be exactly the same as that worn by her three colleagues. By themselves, these are all small acts of exclusion. Together, however, they demonstrate a clear pattern of psychological violence.

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[42] Jean Eustache, *La maman et la putain*, 1973.

[43] Sorente, *Hard copy*, p. 28.

Further, the audience sees Rose's mental state deteriorate when she is on the phone trying to deal with a particularly difficult customer amid a barrage of incessant background hectoring from her three colleagues. She becomes increasingly stressed, gets angry and tries to end the call. At this point Douce grabs the handset from her.[44]

One of Rose's eyes begins to twitch uncontrollably and she is so distressed that she recognises she is confronted with a:

> Double bind, ça veut dire, des ordres qui se contredisent, c'est pour rendre les gens fous.
>
> [Double bind. It means things people say that contradict one another. It sends people mad.][45]

Eventually, this psychological violence transforms into the physical when, in frustration and anger, Rose strikes out at Belle who believes mistakenly that Rose has seriously scarred her face with a deep scratch. Belle is convinced that no man will ever want to make love to her again, the ultimate sin in a male-dominated society that gives primacy to physical perfection. Yet, even here the black humour shines through:

> Je suis défigurée. Quel homme voudra me faire l'amour ? … Par derrière, tu crois qu'ils accepteraient ?
>
> [I'm disfigured. What man would want to make love to me ? … Do you think they might want to do it from behind ?][46]

At this point Belle, abetted by Douce and Blanche, murder Rose. This is illustrated in the photograph provided in the montage in Figure 9. The other photos have been chosen to demonstrate the range of emotional tones expressed during the play.

Following a brief blackout, we learn that Rose's body has been carried off unseen by Blanche to the car park.[47] Douce and her two complicit

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[44] Sorente, *Hard copy*, pp. 32–33.
[45] Sorente, *Hard copy*, p. 13.
[46] Sorente, *Hard copy*, p. 36.
[47] Sorente, *Hard copy*, p. 37.

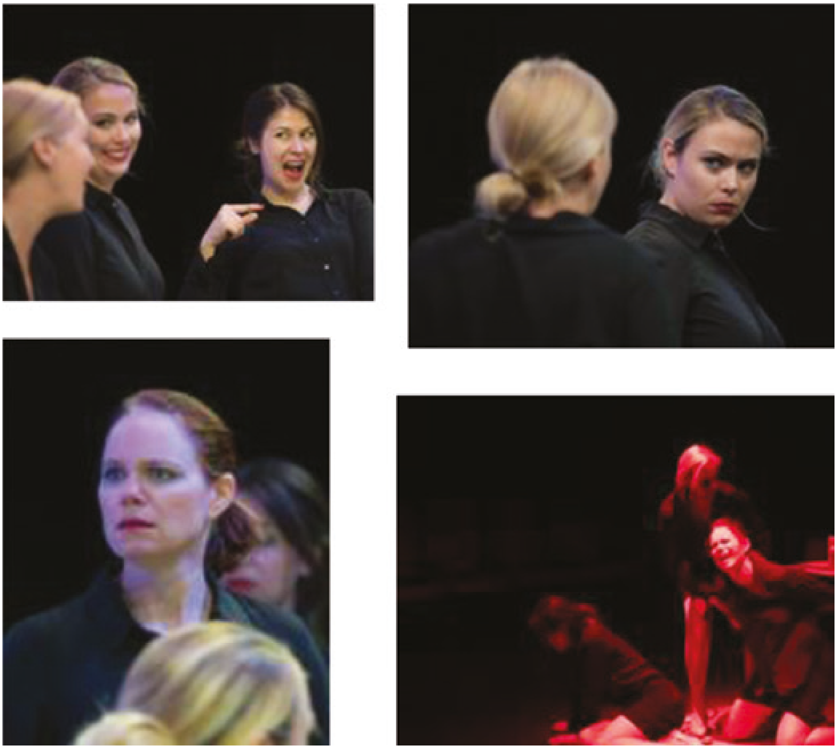

Figure 9. Photos from the English language première of *Hard copy* in 2019.

Top row, L-R: Douce, Blanche and Belle joke, Douce confronts Blanche. Bottom row, L to R: Rose in distress, Rose is murdered

workmates have all smartened up as at the beginning of the play. Whether this is credible seems secondary to the fact that in this final scene, with the three women back in their office routine, we learn horrifically that the organisation has somehow accounted for and forgiven the murder because, according to them, this is allowed for in the company's rule book:

BLANCHE: … Le président directeur général m'a montré le règlement intérieur du Groupe. Il a indiqué un alinéa, en bas de la dernière page, dans lequel est inscrit un pourcentage de perte de 7%.

BELLE: Une perte humaine ?

BLANCHE: Perte d’effectifs

BELLE: Tu crois que c’est la même chose ?

DOUCE: Ce qui compte, c’est qu’on était dans notre droit.

[BLANCHE: … The CEO showed me the Group’s rule book. He pointed to a paragraph, at the bottom of the last page, where a 7% loss was recorded.

BELLE: A human loss ?

BLANCHE: Job losses.

BELLE: You think that’s the same thing ?

DOUCE: What matters is that we were within our rights.][48]

We can therefore see the killing as an ultimate example of systemic violence, that is, it has been routinised by the organisation as acceptable.

While competition is not at the root of the bullying in *Hard copy*, it is clearly an element in the working lives of these women as they jostle with one another to maintain their looks and to narrate outrageous stories. However, these fantasies are outstripped by the brutality of their actions throughout the play and its murderous conclusion.

Despite Rose’s suffering and Douce’s childhood abuse, Sorente does not present this play as a tragedy, but rather as a black comedy. Particularly at the beginning of the play, the dramatic narrative is interspersed with office gossip that is presented as a distraction from the repetitive nature of work, rather than as a weapon for bullying. These revealing and comic diversions give the audience access to some of the thoughts and dreams of the protagonists.[49] Belle’s story of wilfully having group sex with destitute men may be juxtaposed with Douce’s childhood experience of gang rape.

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[48] Sorente, *Hard copy*, pp. 38–40.

[49] Sorente, *Hard copy*, p. 5.

The audience knows that the results are the same. However, the context, and their psychological impact are entirely different.[50]

With her focus on ritual and repetition in human interaction, Sorente appears to be influenced by other writers such as Pinter whose:

> plays abound in those daily habitual activities which have become formalised as ritual and have tended to become empty of meaning, an automatic way of coping with life [and where rituals] force the characters into an awareness of life from which their daily activities have helped protect them.[51]

Further, there are often reminders within the play of the declaratory vaudevillian and comedic flavour of the dialogue, which adds to the overall sense of excess throughout the piece.

There is also evidence here of the influence of Russian playwrights like Gogol, whose comedy often generates a sense of carnival, encouraging an audience to laugh, albeit with ambivalence, about issues that scare them or are received wisdom, say, in this instance, around the intrinsic value of dietary products or shampoo. When considered more deeply, these ideas appear grotesque and absurd.[52]

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[50] As noted earlier in this book, unlike literature and cinema, where the finished cultural object is presented to the public, theatre only provides a script which is worked and reworked by director, cast and audience for each production. This means that no stage performance is ever definitive. In this particular play, audience members variously laugh nervously, guffaw, gasp noisily or remain silent at different times in each performance. These instances cause emotional ripples as individual audience members mentally question whether protagonists' stories are meant to be true within the context of the play or are mere figments of the character's imagination. Meanwhile, during each performance, the actors judge on each occasion if, or when, precisely, it is appropriate to pause. This evaluation is based on five performances of *Hard copy* in my English language translation (used with full authorial approval) presented in St Albans and London in June 2019. A full recording of this production can be found at <https://www.abbeytheatre.org.uk/hard-copy-watch-online/>. A copy of the translation is provided in Appendix 2.

[51] Katharine Burkman, *The Dramatic World of Harold Pinter: Its Basis in Ritual* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1971), p. 10.

[52] Zolotarev Igor Leonardovich, Grotesque realism in "Revizor" by N. V. Gogol *Izvestiâ Ûžnogo Federalʹnogo Universiteta: Filologičeskie Nauki* 2016, No.1,

Ultimately, for all their exaggerated nature, *Hard copy* is not a mere entertainment to be played for fun. It makes some very serious points about workplace bullying within a darkly comic framework. In fact, it is arguable that the group bullying or mobbing appears more, rather than less, horrific because of the interspersion of comic elements. Ultimately, the play draws in the audience so that they too become witnesses.

As demonstrated by Frédéric El Kaïm in his play *Les nouveaux barbares* (analysed in Chapter 3), Sorente is not alone in juxtaposing tragedy with comedy as a means of ensuring the core message of the repulsiveness and terror evoked by workplace bullying.

Concluding comments

This chapter has explored the role of witnesses in workplace bullying. It has concluded that this is not always fixed. This is because witnesses are an integral part of any bullying scenario and the desires and pressures they feel can influence outcomes and engage them to act on behalf of the bully, the target or not at all. In practice, this means that individual witness roles can vary over time, from witnesses being mere onlookers to active bullies and back again. The challenge for the target is to find ways to engage these witnesses to support them. This is often a difficult task, especially where the witness fears their active involvement could result in them being bullied too, or indeed if they feel bullying is, in fact, justified. In some instances, the psychological pressures on witnesses mean that their responses appear inconsistent and their innermost reactions are unknown. This may also occur because organisational factors and individuals with specific needs and insecurities are constantly impacting on one another.

Moreover, this chapter has sought to demonstrate the ability of fictional storytelling to interrogate the interstices of tales about the ambiguous and sometimes changing position of witnesses to workplace bullying in relation

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pp. 43–50 [online] <https://doaj.org/article/e8ada844ccb446acb98a73b07c129e6d> [accessed 27/04/2018].

to perpetrators, targets and their employing organisations. These stories are rich in detail, self-doubt and interpersonal conflict. They sometimes appear able to penetrate the subject deeper than non-fictional accounts because of the nuanced, multidimensional situations they represent which in turn can spark a profound emotional response from the reader/spectator.

Many of the theoretical strands from the critical literature can be evidenced in the three stories analysed in this chapter. This feasibly provides a strong basis for them to be regarded as solid representations of lived experience. Specifically, even in the sometimes-surreal examination of human interactions that plays out in the stage drama, *Hard copy*, these tales can be seen to reflect the sometimes-dystopian nature of the human condition. They cover: belief in a 'just world'; the tendency for some witnesses to misconstrue what triggers bullying and the target's ability to defend themselves without third-party support; witness reluctance to intervene, particularly when they are part of a group; and that witness roles may not always remain so.

CHAPTER 7

Storytelling as authentic lived experience

ANDREW: You've come to us with your story, but once you've come to us with your story, your story is also ours. Because no-one's story is theirs alone. I hope you realise that …[1]

This chapter draws together the main findings of this study. It sets out a number of conclusions derived from the foregoing analysis and focuses specifically on the contribution that storytelling makes to individual understanding of the worker experience and the public debate about workplace bullying in contemporary France. It reinforces the argument that fiction purposely engages its wide audience of readers and spectators to scrutinise and reflect on this often covert activity through its use of detail, language, style and structure, as well as its focus on individual lived experience. This is not the case with social science studies that are generally focussed on rigorous analyis of data and/or trends. These latter are, as a rule, directed at a narrower audience. More broadly, the chapter argues, as in the previous epigraph, that storytelling is an activity able to communicate messages that are universal.

This chapter also contends that communications disseminated to workers and potential recruits by organisations through human resources, public relations and other departments can constitute a form of 'dark' messaging which repeatedly encourages these individuals to view the world exclusively through the eyes of the organisation in its search for increased profit and market share. This is because such communications assert explicity or implicity that there is an indissoluble alignment of interests between organisations and their workers.[2]

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[1] Martin Crimp, *The Treatment* (London: Nick Hern Books, 1993), Act 1, Scene 3, p. 17.

However, this perspective may be said to represent only one version of this relationship. This is because, in practice, the neoliberal business model, as consistently reflected in contemporary French storytelling, and the social science commmentaries and clinical research reviewed and analysed throughout this study, can be seen overwhelmingly to promote the interests of shareholders above all others, including workers. Significantly, this picture is also supported by the testimonies of suffering from workers in the recent France Télécom trial where management used 'dark' messaging as part of its strategy to dominate workers psychologically.[3] As a consequence, this study maintains that stories of the imagination about workplace bullying analysed here have consistently revealed that corporate messaging may be considered a form of mental coercion.[4] Thus, fictional narratives echo the demonstrably authentic lived experiences of individuals who suffer shame, domination and social isolation as they struggle to meet stringent performance targets imposed in the modern workplace. It is therefore not coincidental that some of these stories are written by individuals, such as Thierry Beinstingel and Marin Ledun, with experience of working at France Télecom.[5]

This study has also sought to show how workplace bullying is represented in contemporary French workplace fiction mostly as psychological, rather than physical, violence against individuals estranged from one another through organisational policies and practices, and that contribute to a culture of systemic violence. This conclusion is supported by a theoretical framework derived from the works of Bourdieu and Žižek set out in Chapter 1. These fictional narratives typically reveal workers dominated by middle managers who themselves feel subjugated by their own often geographically distant senior managers and who, in turn, monitor subordinates remotely through technology. Today's workers and managers typically operate in complex organisations where individuals sometimes exist in a state of psychic isolation, despite associating with others, and where there is negligible social solidarity and constant fear of job loss. This means that managers may find they are both perpetrators and targets of workplace violence because neoliberalism encourages them to adopt aggressive behaviour towards subordinates to achieve their own exacting organisational performance objectives, while they as individuals remain emotionally isolated and full of self-doubt. This phenomenon can, for instance, be seen in the film, *Corporat*e, and the novel, *L'homme qui aimait trop travailler*, both analysed earlier.

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[2] Erika Darics and Veronika Koller, *Language in Business, Language at Work* (London: Palgrave, 2018).

[3] Beynel and Robert, *La raison des plus* (2020), *Aveuglement managérial*, pp. 143–145.

[4] Evidence of various forms of mental coercion stem from the Nazi era. See, for instance, Joost Meerloo, *The Rape of the Mind: The Psychology of Thought Control, Menticide, and Brainwashing* (Eastford, CT: Martino Fine Books, 2015) Originally published 1961. There are also abundant examples of analogous techniques cited earlier by Dejours, Grenier Pezé, Linhart and others in relation to contemporary business.

[5] See for instance: Maryline Heck, Entretien avec Martine Sonnet et Thierry Beinstingel, in Aurélie Adler and Maryline Heck (eds), *Écrire le travail au XXIe Siécle : quelles implications politiques* (Paris : Presses Sorbonne Nouvelle, 2016), pp. 123–133, and Marin Ledun and Brigitte Font Le Bret, *Pendant qu'il comptent les morts* (Paris : La Tengo, 2010).

Fiction also represents how such violence impacts third parties, including workmates and workplace doctors and psychologists, all of whom can be engaged as witnesses, but equally as bullies and/ or targets in an environment where disrespect for others has become the norm. This can be seen, for instance, in the novel *Les visages écrasées* and the stage play, *Hard copy*.

As illustrated in Table 6, these stories also reflect the multifaceted nature of psychological violence evidenced and analysed by psychologists, sociologists and other commentators throughout this study. Such violence is therefore a social phenomenon that can adapt to the working environment and the nature of work carried out by the target. It ranges from individuals engaged in repetitive, process-driven work, such as call handling, to knowledge workers, including pharmaceutical researchers and financial specialists, whose jobs are to deploy their brain power to find novel and sustainable ways for organisations profitably to compete in the global marketplace. As regards jobs with routinised tasks, ongoing digital monitoring through measurable performance outputs generally provides a basis for reviewing performance standards. With knowledge workers,

Table 6. Storytelling: A contextual synthesis

Story	Business	Stakeholders	'Dark-side' actions
Au pays des (play)	Theme park	Management	Controlling, dominating, shaming, creating fear
Ressources humaines (film)	Manufacturing	Management, family, childhood friends	Humiliating, patronising, continuing surveillance and control
Corporate (film)	Conglomerate	Management, family	Dominating, pressured, controlling, management deniability of workers' stress
Les visages écrasés (novel) *Carole Matthieu* (film)	Telecoms, incl. call centre	Management, occupational physician	Dominating, infantilising workers, sudden changes in business priorities, constant measurement and control
La question humaine (novel and film)	Pharmaceuticals	Management, occupational psychologist	Shaming, patronising, management deniability of workers' stress, duplicity, brutalising people processes, use of dumbed down business terminology to obfuscate meaning and intent
Hard copy (play)	Unknown. Admin office	Co-workers	Dominating, game playing, sarcasm, individual isolation
Trois huit (film)	Glass-bottle making	Co-workers, as bully and bystanders, family	Game playing, shaming, mocking, threats of, and actual, physical violence
La loi du marché (film)	Hypermarket	Management, security guard, other workers	Constant surveillance through technology, brutal discipline
Les nouveaux barbares (play)	Conglomerate	Management, union, wife, public through radio broadcast	Constant performance measurement, shaming, mocking

Table 6. Continued

Story	Business	Stakeholders	'Dark-side' actions
Des clous (novel)	Technology controls	CEO and selected managers and staff	Constant pressure to perform, physically harmful dress code, use of business terminology, lies, shaming, performance standards
Retour aux mots sauvages (novel)	Call centre	Management, co-workers	Constant surveillance and performance control, forced use of business terminology

however, the emphasis is on subjective assessment of individual 'capabilities' or 'competencies', such as 'creativity' or 'potential' that are considered measurable when, in actuality, they can only be assessed subjectively as management opinion because, among other things, individual potential may be considered unknowable.[6]

Some of the stories analysed earlier demonstrate how organisations seek to recognise the importance of the knowledge worker to long-term commercial success by, for instance, providing above-market reward packages and so incentivising individuals to buy into the notion of alignment with the organisation's objectives. This strategy may well include using 'dark' messaging to encourage such individuals to feel that spiritual self-fulfilment can only be achieved by putting the organisation first and then only considering personal, family and social needs as an afterthought.[7] Failure to achieve individual objectives can therefore create a sense of guilt and shame.

So, all the stories and much of the clinical and sociological research, analysed in this study support the argument that the commercial doctrine of full alignment between organisation and individual needs is an illusion. Rather than creating a sense of individual self-actualisation, lived experience is more likely to reflect an outcome involving psychological and physical suffering for workers who find they are routinely coerced with little or no influence to alter their subservient position. Suffering can manifest itself in many ways, including loss of appetite, sleeplessness, bio-mechanical disorders, psychosis and suicide.[8] Further, according to psychologist, Christophe Dejours, workers do not just suffer because of the work environment in which they find themselves, but also because of fear or threat of unemployment in an economic climate in which uncertainty is ever-present given, in particular, constant changes in technology and market demand.[9]

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[6] Coppey, *Potentiel* (2013).

[7] Stephen Linstead, Garance Maréchal, and Ricky W. Griffin, "Theorizing and Researching the Dark Side of Organization," *Organization Studies* 35, no. 2 (2014): pp. 165–188.

Fiction: The advocate of authentic experience

From this analysis, it would now seem there are two opposing views of the world which provide an insoluble contradiction for organisations, as well as workers and indeed society in general. On the one hand, the neoliberal business model argues consistently in favour of a complete alignment of interests between organisations and workers and is based on a range of controlling processes (including performance management and appraisal) that are labelled here as forms of 'psychological violence'. French sociologist David Courpasson sets out this position as follows:

> The government of organisations is a mode of domination, not through a simple subjugation, or even through the explicit sacrifice of private life to the necessities of work and flexibility, but through the illusion of consistency and similarities of destinies that it promotes … Creating the impression of having similar conditions of treatment … while completely manipulating the instruments of differentiation, that is what constitutes 'the art of soft domination' of contemporary management …[10]

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[8] Grenier-Pezé, Petits meurtres, *Pistes*, 2005.

[9] Christophe Dejours, Aliénation et clinique du travail, *Actuel Marx*, 2006/1 (n° 39).

[10] Courpasson, *Soft Constraint* (2006), pp. 230–231.

This corporate discourse is echoed in management texts on such subjects as human resource management, leadership and change, all of which endorse the primacy of the neoliberal model without question.[11] It is also reflected in organisational communications with *external* customer markets (i.e. the so-called 'external brand') so as to create, as it were, an exterior circle of common belief through such slogans as those of the cosmetic company, L'Oréal, with its: 'parce que je le vaux bien'. Since first introduced in the 1970s, this has cleverly forged a single identity between the organisation, the growth of female economic purchasing power and individual customer preferences.[12] The latest variant of this particular slogan, 'parce que nous le valons bien' ['because we're worth it'], neatly enfolds the organisation, its workforce and customers within a single, all-embracing comfort blanket, while the corporate 'nous' ['we'] is a marketing and public relations invention.[13]

Corporate discourse has therefore produced a paradox in which the organisation that exists in the realm of authentic experience has created a manufactured personality and history of itself in the world in which it operates. This emphasises its commercial and social virtues but none of its imperfections, such as questions over management behaviour towards workers when individuals are under constant pressure. In other words, it has constructed a 'truth' from a 'fabrication' and imbedded it so deeply into the psyche of neoliberal society that this invention appears to have been accepted by many public influencers, particularly management thinkers, who assert that individuals who provide guidance and control in organisations will always behave equitably and with empathy.[14] However, the critical sources, research and stories cited in this study argue consistently that individuals in organisations do not always behave in ways that are fair and honest. Instead, they prioritise their own needs, especially with regard to the any perceived coalition of organisational and individual worker interests.

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[11] Dave Ulrich, David Kryscynski, and Mike Ulrich, *Victory through Organization: Why the War for Talent Is Failing Your Company and What You Can Do about It* (New York: McGraw-Hill Education, 2017).

[12] <https://www.loreal-paris.fr/la-marque/notre-histoire> [accessed 01/08/2021] and 15: L'Oréal (1971) – Because I'm Worth It: Ilon Specht, McCann Erickson, *Creative Review* [online] <https://www.creativereview.co.uk/because-im-worth-it-loreal/> [accessed 21/08/2019].

[13] Camille Labro, Un slogan bien enraciné, [online] lemonde.fr. 02/12/2011, <https://www.lemonde.fr/m-styles/article/2011/12/02/un-slogan-bien-enracine_1611644_4497319.html [accessed 08/02/2020].

This is where stories based on the imagination enter the picture. Unlike corporate discourse which transmutes actuality into myth, storytellers may be said to do the opposite. They reveal 'truths' through fiction by laying bare the veracity of the human experience in the contemporary workplace, that is, that psychosocial suffering exists where the subordination of individual workers to organisational compliance processes is the norm; and where these individuals, routinely dehumanised by psychological violence are shamed, isolated and socially excluded.

All the stories covered in this study offer glimpses into dystopian organisations in which workers are paradoxically compelled to exist in societies presented by neoliberalism as utopian.[15] This contradiction is perhaps represented most vividly in the absurdist play, *Au pays des*, where writer Sylvain Levey constantly compels the audience to regard the theme park within which his drama is set as a fabricated Neverland for visitors, while it is exists for its workers as a kind of psychic torture chamber that seeks to control every deed and thought.[16] This approach may be said to encourage the play's spectators to examine their own values and the way they behave. It also suggests that neoliberalism is a human construct which encourages selfish, malevolent, behaviour that may be regarded as dystopian. As Dominique Lhuilier puts it:

> Quelle cohérence trouver entre l'image que l'entreprise cherche à produire d'elle-même et l'expérience de ceux qui se voient relégués au rang de résidus ?

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[14] See, for instance, Peter Drucker, *The Essential Drucker* (London: Routledge, 2007).

[15] Thomas More, *Utopia*, trans. Dominic Baker-Smith (London: Penguin Classics, 2020) Originally published 1516.

[16] James Matthew Barrie, *Peter Pan* (Ware: Wordworth, 2018) Originally published 1904.

> [What consistency can be found between the image that the company seeks to project of itself and the experience of those who see themselves downgraded to being a mere by-product?]

Meanwhile, Lhuilier acknowledges that the side effects of organisational decisions can include negative or 'dark' social impacts. For instance:

> … La communication institutionnelle des entreprises met l'accent sur la nécessité d'un développement conjoint du progrès économique et social. Le thème de la responsabilité sociale trouve diverses déclinaisons, dont certaines sont particulièrement 'touchantes'.
>
> [… Corporate communications emphasises the need for joint development of economic and social progress. The theme of social responsibility is used in a various ways, some of which are particularly 'poignant'].[17]

However, this does not mean that fiction merely recreates 'fact' or 'reality' in a single definitive or objective way. This is because the writer/ director, along with the spectator and reader, will have their own political or social agenda shaped by their individual experiences. Therefore, all parties involved in storytelling frame and reframe the narratives they present and absorb to reflect their own experiences, perceptions and needs. However, in no way do they try to conceal any ugly facts supported by individual lived experiences of their protagonists.

These stories also repeatedly draw out and examine a number of themes that can be summarised as a paradigm of workplace bullying, as shown in Figure 10. Many of these themes appear and reappear throughout these stories and, arguably, underpin the very essence of individual suffering at work.

In practice, the stories analysed here focus ultimately on individuals faced with some form of psychological and moral crisis, and rarely on issues of class conflict. These stories are also silent about any form of religious relief for individual protagonists under psychological pressure. Instead, they emphasise the scale of individual isolation in the neoliberal world. In short, by selecting and restructuring events to make a particular case, these storytellers present a vision of the world that opposes the accepted

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[17] Lhuilier, *Placardisés* (2002), p. 223.

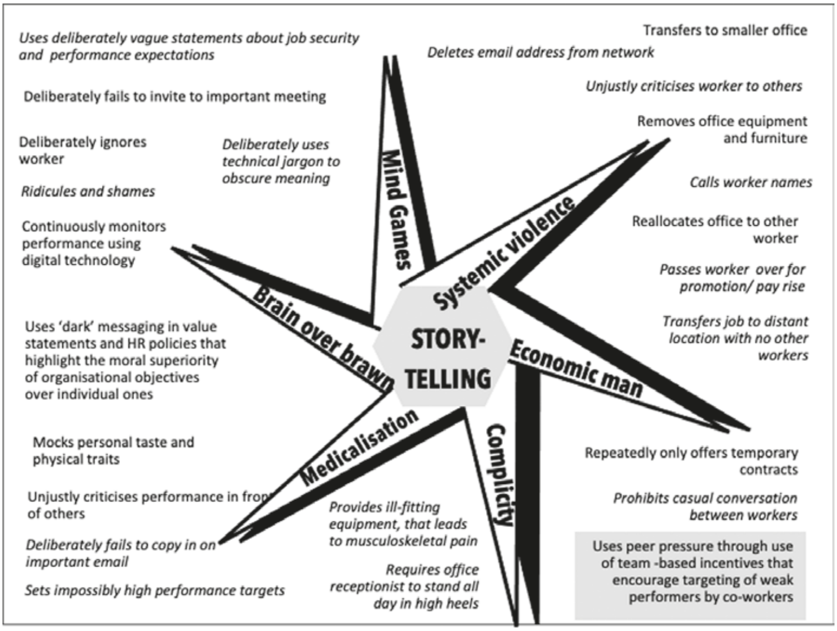
Uses deliberately vague statements about job security and performance expectations
Deliberately fails to invite to important meeting
Deliberately ignores worker
Deliberately uses technical jargon to obscure meaning
Ridicules and shames
Continuously monitors performance using digital technology
Uses 'dark' messaging in value statements and HR policies that highlight the moral superiority of organisational objectives over individual ones
Mocks personal taste and physical traits
Unjustly criticises performance in front of others
Deliberately fails to copy in on important email
Sets impossibly high performance targets
Provides ill-fitting equipment, that leads to musculoskeletal pain
Requires office receptionist to stand all day in high heels
Transfers to smaller office
Deletes email address from network
Unjustly criticises worker to others
Removes office equipment and furniture
Calls worker names
Reallocates office to other worker
Passes worker over for promotion/ pay rise
Transfers job to distant location with no other workers
Repeatedly only offers temporary contracts
Prohibits casual conversation between workers
Uses peer pressure through use of team -based incentives that encourage targeting of weak performers by co-workers
Mind Games
Systemic violence
Brain over brawn
STORY-TELLING
Economic man
Medicalisation
Complicity

Figure 10. A paradigm of workplace bullying in storytelling

commercial credo of the organisation as benevolent and inclusive and which invariably operates in a frictionless partnership with its workers.

Given the current state of knowledge, it appears impossible to assert in any meaningful way that the impact of fiction about workplace bullying on society can be 'measured' as such. However, it can be argued with some degree of assurance that:

> Sans miroir, on ne voit rien …
>
> [Without a mirror … we see nothing …][18]

Storytelling provides us with an opaque lens through which actuality can be discerned and better understood. It often provides an uncomfortable, disquieting and piercing reflection of genuine lived experience and how we react to it:

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[18] Loïck Roche, Préface in Laurent Lesavre, *Scènes de management: le théâtre au service de l'entreprise* (Grenoble: Presses universitaire de Grenoble, 2013), p. 5.

> Miroir grossissant, quand il se fait révélateur de nos difficultés, de nos méprises, de nos colères, de nos violences parfois; miroir attendri, quand il se fait reflet de nos efforts, de nos timidités, de nos petitesses; miroir déformant quand il se fait insistant sur nos dysfonctionnements récurrent, sur notre incapacité à communiquer, partager, écouter, entendre, etc …
>
> [A magnifying mirror, when it exposes our difficulties, our misunderstandings, our anger, sometimes our violence; a compassionte mirror, when it exposes our efforts, our shyness, our pettiness; a distorting mirror when it highlights our repeated dysfunctions, our inability to communicate, share, listen, hear, etc.][19]

We may conclude from the continued interest in these stories by publishers, readers, film directors and spectators that these tales of the imagination engage and provide some degree of emotional release for those readers and spectators with experience of workplace bullying because it helps them feel less isolated emotionally. These stories also help to sustain public debate and so keep the issue of workplace bullying in the public eye.

As far as further research in this area is concerned, a comparative examination of fiction on workplace bullying elsewhere within Europe and beyond, especially in Japan and the US, where such psychological violence is known to be an issue, would offer a clear line of enquiry and analysis.[20] In particular, Japanese legal measures to halt so-called 'power harassment' in organisations with rigid hierarchical relationships appear particularly interesting.[21] Further research on French fiction, this time focusing on sexual harassment, might be another area for examination.

In the final analysis, workplace bullying is likely to persist in contemporary organisations because of continuing pressure to improve performance that is placed on employees – whether managers or workers. This includes the ease with which some individuals are able to dominate others because of lack of organisational desire to address known areas of friction. This study suggests that in this environment it is the responsibility of cultural producers to continue representing the nature of contemporary working life in ways that are clearer and more authentic than organisational discourse with all its serpentine contortions.

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[19] Roche in Lesavre, *Scènes* (2013), p. 6.

[20] G. Namie and R. Namie, *The Bully at Work* (Naperville, IL: Sourcebooks Inc., 2003).

[21] Isabelle Steger, "Japan Finally Passed Laws to Prevent 'pawa hara', or Workplace Bullying," *Quartz at Work*, 30 May 2019 [online] <https://qz.com/work/1631097/japan-passes-laws-to-prevent-pawa-hara-workplace-bullying/> [accessed 28/08/2019].

APPENDIX 1

Corporate: Emilie's journey: A sequence analysis

The four short scenes selected for this analysis demonstrate how Emilie: is initially confident and assertive; reacts in horror to Dalmat's suicide; becomes complicit in covering up why it happened; then subsequently suffers increasing self-doubt when she hits her emotional nadir and becomes drunk in a bar with strangers. These scenes are presented chronologically. This analysis also demonstrates that Silhol's direction reflects the growth in tension in the film's atmosphere following the suicide. This is partly a function of choice and use of camera, as well as sequence length.

A	B	C	D	E
Scene description	Position in film (mins)	Scene length (mins)	No. of camera positions	C ÷ D (mins)
1. Introducing Emilie at work	1.53 to 3.41	1.88	17 (dolly)	0.11/ i.e. approx. 7 secs
2. Dalmat's suicide	7.09 to 8.58	1.49	25 (handheld)	0.06/ i.e. 3.5 approx. secs
3. Senior management video conference	10.10 to 11.35	1.25	22 (handheld)	0.06
4. Emilie at rock bottom	58.35 to 60.49	2.14	38 (handheld)	0.06

The first scene is just under two minutes long. It shows Emilie in her office with the door closed. Although physically shut off from the rest of the HR department, the audience hears and sees her in discussion with an employee about the latter's future. Emilie has a calm, controlled businesslike manner. The camera is fixed on a dolly beyond her glass office wall and, sequence-by-sequence, it gradually approaches this transparent pane separating Emilie's office from the open-plan area of the HR department. We can only hear the conversation in the office because, even though the camera remains beyond it, looking in at all times, there is no general office chatter to be heard. As a consequence, the audience instantly knows that the protagonists are in a large modern office building, not elsewhere, and its focus is entirely on the conversation, not on any visual cues from the protagonists involved. This is a very tranquil scene and the sense of calm is achieved partly through this lack of 'extraneous' sound and the smoothness of the dolly shots. This overall atmosphere is helped too by having an average sequence length in this opening scene almost twice that of the comparable figures in the other three scenes examined. There are just seventeen sequences in this first scene which totals 1.88 minutes in length. This means that the average sequence length here is around seven seconds.

The next scene examined includes Dalmat's suicide. This is the tipping point of the entire film – the event that triggers all subsequent actions. From this scene onwards the film uses a handheld camera rather than dolly shots. This type of cinematography excels at intrusive angle and close shots; and as this second scene progresses, the audience sees how these techniques, along with shorter sequences and disparate off-screen voices reacting to the suicide, help build tension. The second scene is around 25 per cent shorter than the first but it contains eight more sequences. In this second scene, along with the third and fourth scenes examined, the average length of shot is around 0.06 minutes, that is, some three seconds in length – half that of the comparable figure for the first scene. In the final scene selected, Emilie is first seen drinking alone in a bar then invites herself to join a group of Japanese businessmen who are celebrating. She subsequently becomes increasingly drunk. Here the total number of sequences increases to thirty-eight (more than double the figure in the first scene), with the camera cutting between close ups, some taken over the shoulder of another protagonist. These camera movements contrast markedly with the static long shot at the end of this particular scene. This shows a street with Emilie, once again alone, retching into the road, while traffic passes behind her, across a T-junction. Thus, by drawing these scenes together, we can see how the director has combined choice and use of camera and sequence length to create pace and tension.

Further, by examining each scene in the film in this way, it is possible to see how events considered unimportant to the plot, or which might compromise the overall narrative if revealed too early, are omitted. For instance, the second (suicide) scene directly follows the street altercation between Emilie and Dalmat. This culminates in her angrily telling him to resign. She then returns to her parked car, in the company's underground car park. However, we do not see her walking back to, or entering, the car. Further, there is a time lapse between her street tussle with Dalmat and this suicide. We cannot tell how long this is. However, as Emilie and the audience discovers towards the end of the film, this gap is crucial because during this period Emilie's boss, Stéphane, had his own face-to-face clash with Dalmat – and it is only after this event that Dalmat takes his own life. To some extent this reduces the weight of guilt on Emilie personally, but she remains very conscious of her role in contributing significantly to a pressurised management culture which doubtlessly was a major influence on Dalmat's decision to kill himself.

1. Introducing Emilie and her work

Description of shot	Camera	Dialogue/Sounds
1. Sophie (Emilie's PA) seen from behind only, at own desk outside Emilie's office. In background, E faces inwards seated behind desk, while an employee (Catherine – we learn later) faces her. We hear C and see E clearly through glass wall that separates E's office from rest of the floor. E sounds confident, assertive. unsentimental.	Dolly long shot	Emilie : Vous avez 46 ans. Vous êtes au moment phare de votre carrière. Comment est-ce que vous voyez dans 10 ans ? Catherine : Dans 10 ans ? E: Dans 2 ans, dans 6 mois ? Low, background music creates intrigue and audience engagement. We do not hear any sound outside E's office.

Description of shot	Camera	Dialogue/Sounds
	Dolly moves forward. Stops	C : Je ne sais pas. E : Ce n’est pas une question piège. Je me la pose aussi.
2. Sophie gets up from desk and disappears off left.	Dolly shot	E : Et alors vous voyez comment ? Vous savez Catherine nous sommes dans un monde en mutation permanente. C’est très important de ne pas subir ces évolutions. De savoir les anticiper.
3. S returns, looks into E’s office. Sits at her desk.		E : Comment vous envisagez la suite ?
	Dolly forward. Stops	C : Je … J’aimerais continuer à travailler au sein de l’équipe et donner la meilleure de moi-même tout en travaillant sur les points que nous avons identifié ensemble. Voilà.
4. S now partially out of shot.	Dolly forward. Stops	E : Il y a des perspectives au sein d’Esen, des tas de possibilités à évoluer.
5. Man moves in and out of screen on left. He has shoulder bag and coat slung over it. Sophie now completely out of shot.	Dolly forward. Stops. Camera almost against E’s glass wall. Camera keeps zooming in	C : Vous pensez que je devrais changer de poste? E : Moi, je ne me suis pas pensée dans votre place mais nous pouvons réfléchir ensemble si vous voulez. C : Est-ce que vous me demandez de me mettre en mobilité ? E : Je peux vous accompagnez dans votre réflexion à sujet.
6. See E alone through office glass wall: Seated and writing. Noise of office chatter in background	Dolly forward	Sophie on phone, voice off : Je comprends que vous soyez pressé mais elle n’est pas visible aujourd’hui.
7. E finishes writing. Puts paper in folder and begins to draw away from her desk: Disappears right behind filing cabinet.	Camera pans right. Dolly static	S continues call, voice off: Je suis désolé mais c’est même compliqué avant la fin de la semaine.

Description of shot	Camera	Dialogue/Sounds
8. E walks swiftly to exit office, folder in hand and approaches Sophie who glances up at her briefly.	Dolly forward. Pans to follow E	
9. S hurriedly finishes call.		S: Écoutez Monsieur Dalmat. Je vois avec elle et je reviens vers vous dès que possible, d'accord ? On va faire comme ça, merci.
10. E Looks serious.	Dolly up: close up of E	S to caller: Merci
11. Sound of phone being put down.		E: Catherine Tremblay se met en mobilité. Il lui faut un formulaire. Tu peux l'informer là s'il te plaît ?
12. S and E in conversation		S: Et quand est-ce que tu peux voir Dalmat? E: Je n'ai pas le temps avant la fin du mois.
13. E starts to move back to own office		E: Tout se patienter S: Il a reçu ton mail. Il ne comprend pas.
14. E walks away		E: Te laisse pas mettre la pression.

2. The tipping point: Dalmat's suicide

Description of shot	Camera	Dialogue/Sounds
1. E at desk seated behind computer screen. Employees pass in front of camera	Camera static	Brief sound of employees in discussion as they pass
2. Shot over E's shoulder of her playing arcade game on smartphone.	Handheld camera	Game sounds.
3. S relaxed eats lunch out of plastic bowl at desk	Handheld camera	Sense of calm

Description of shot	Camera	Dialogue/Sounds
4. E at desk seated behind computer.	Handheld	Noise of chatter
5. Again over shoulder. Shot of E’s smartphone and game.		
6. E looks up suddenly		Loud thump Scream off
7. E (shot from behind) gets up. S rises at same time and goes towards source of sound		
8. E exits office, stares out and gradually moves forward	Camera pans back	General noise of mêlée, sound of sobbing.
9. Employee runs up behind E and then goes in front of her		Voice off : Qu’est-ce que c’est ? Other voice off : C’est dans la cour.
10. S by courtyard window opposite E’s office, looking back horrified to E. Moves back.		Sounds of sobbing.
11. E stares in horror at what she sees		Sounds of sobbing.
12. E staggers away down corridor, passing male employee who is moving away and who looks over his shoulder at her		Introduction of music: quiet long chords. Sounds of panicking.
13. E continues, staggering, head down, along corridor, down small flight of stares	Camera pulls back	Voice off: Qu’est-ce qui ce passe ?
14. E in ladies’ restroom pulling at paper towel machine	E. head and shoulders	
15. E moves round wiping hands breathing heavily. Turns	Camera follows E	
16. Fresh shot of E from front in restroom, moves slightly out of shot	Camera follows E	Voice off in corridor : Laissez-passer !
17. E exits and returns to corridor. Silhouetted shoulder of another employee.	Camera follows E	Voice off : Je sais pas du tout, j’ai juste entendu un bruit.

Description of shot	Camera	Dialogue/Sounds
18. Paramedic passes E	Camera switches to position over E's shoulder so we can see where paramedic is going	Chatter
19. E rushes passed other employees including management colleague, Vincent who is in a group.	Camera follows E.	Chatter
20. E moves to window giving on to courtyard. They are on the ground floor. Three men clustered to right inside office. Paramedic with shoulder bag walks back through courtyard doorway into office		Chatter
21. He gazes in direction of courtyard		Chatter
22. Lower half of body on low stretcher trolley having just been laid there by at least three people, including paramedic	Camera follows	
23. V talks to E who looks stunned. They move away together.	Head and shoulders shot	Vincent: Viens E : Allez, ou est Sophie ? V. Je … Je ne sais pas E : Stéphane : Il est où ? V : Il va arriver.
24. V puts arm around E and walks her away from the courtyard. Paramedic seen behind them looking down.		

3. Video conference with senior management : Emilie becomes complicit

Description of shot	Camera	Dialogue/Sounds
1. PDG (or similar) on screen. Watched by E, Stéphane (St), Another Senior Manager (ASM) and PR manager, Nathalie (N).	Handheld camera. Wide room shot.	PDG : Qu'est-ce qu'ils disent, la police ? ASM: Ils ont fait leur enquête dans les étages.
2. ASM	Close up on ASM	ASM: Ils ont quatre témoins qui ont vu Dalmat sauter. Voila. C'est un suicide
3. PDG on screen	Medium shot of PDG on TV screen	PDG: C'est notre premier suicide, Stéphane ?
4. St with E standing back right	Close up	St: Sur le lieu de travail, oui.
5. ASM	Close up	ASM : On va couper un enquête du CHSCT
6. PDG on screen	Close up	PDG : Comme ça, c'est ton affaire. Tu diriges le comité d'hygiène. Nathalie relis moi, ton truc.
7. N reads from prepared statement	Close up	N : Alors, 'un événement dramatique viens de se produire au siège d'Esen. La Direction et l'ensemble de ses salariés sont profondément affectés. Ils s'associent à la douleur de la famille ainsi des collègues' PDG: On a prévu la famille ?
8. St with E in background	Medium shot	N : L'infirmière s'en occupe
9. N continues to read	Camera pans to N then close up	N : Une cellule de soutien de psychologie est mise en place.
10. PDG	Pan to TV screen	PDG : Donc … N : Ce drame est lié à des raisons personnelles et n'a à priori aucun rapport avec l'environnement professionnel ASM : Ça passera pas ça

Description of shot	Camera	Dialogue/Sounds
11. ASM	Close up	ASM : C'est comme si on se reprochait quelque chose ou si on est dans le déni complet
12. N looks over to ASM seated next to her	Camera cuts to N and ASM	N : Mais c'est-ce que tout le monde dit. Je peux prendre 10 communications qui finissent tous comme ça.
13. PDG on TV screen	Medium shot of PDG on TV	
14. St and E	Medium shot of St and E	ASM: Mais ça veut rien dire
15. N looks over to PDG on screen	Close up of N	ASM mockingly: Pourquoi vous vous êtes suicidés? Pour des raisons personnels?
16. E hesitates then speaks	Medium shot of E	E : On peut mettre 'événement personnel'
17. Whole group in office with PDG on TV screen	Long shot of whole group	PDG: Qui c'est qui parle la ? St: Emilie Tesson, c'est la responsable de Dalmat. C'est elle qui pilote l'équipe de crise. PDG: Qu'est-ce que vous voulez dire exactement ?
18. E	Close up of E	E: Dalmat venait de se séparer de sa femme.
19. Nathalie		E : Il n'habitait chez lui depuis 3 mois PDG off screen: Vous êtes sûr
20. Emilie		E: Certaine, il avait changé de l'adresse
21. E pauses, then continues		E: Certains disent qu'il est en dépression
22. St with E further back to side right	Close up of S	St: Ça règle le problème

4. Emilie at her lowest point

Description of shot	Camera	Dialogue/Sounds
1. E with half-full glass of wine alone at busy bar surrounded by strangers sitting, standing all talking to one another	E at bar	General hubbub and background music throughout
2. Left side of E's face. Deep in thought	Close up	
3. E turns, sees group of five smart-suited, Japanese businessmen (JBs) seated in corner around a low table happily chatting and toasting one another	Follows E's gaze. Gradually brings Japanese group into focus	
4. E approaches table	Shot of E from behind as she approaches group	JBs share a joke, laugh. E (*In English throughout conversation with JBs*): Hello gentlemen, may I join your team.
5. They welcome her. She sits.		E: Thank you very much
6. E, still seen only at a distance from behind, accepts drink.		E : You look very nice … Thank you
7. E seated and holding shot glass full of alcohol. Clearly wearing wedding ring.	Close up shot of E's right hand	E: Thank you. What is it ?
8. E's face mostly obscured by back of JB's head as he moves forward to toast with her. JB's head goes back and we see E smiling.	Moves to show E facing forward at head and shoulder height with JB in profile on right	1st JB: Soju ! 2nd JB: So-you ! E : Oh ! E: How you say ?
9. Starts to toast group		Japanese voices: Geonbae!
10. JBs toast E	Close up of JBs around E	All: Geonbae!

Description of shot	Camera	Dialogue/Sounds
11. E drinks. JB on left also drinking. We can see from her face that the drink is very strong.	Close up of E	
12. JB opposite leans forward to put down own glass	Close up of JB opposite	E tries to speak. Laughter.
13. JB's face		JB to E off : OK, Park, Hyundai, top managers.
14. E and JB move forward across table to shake hands (unseen)	Close shot of E and JB from behind JB's left shoulder	E : Tesson, Esen.
15. E leans back. She is getting drunk.		E.: I'm a top manager too. I'm a 'killeuse'.
16. Smiling JB turns to colleague on left	E still facing camera	E: I'm not a killer, I mean.
17. JB laughs with colleagues	JB right side close up	JB: (laughing) She's killer. All laugh.
18. Four JBs smiling and laughing	Camera swoops back	JB: We are all killers, here E: Ya.
19. E right profile with 2 JB's on her left (i.e. right of screen)	Camera back to E	JB: OK.
20. E laughing with JBs	E close up with main JB on her left	JB: Let us drink to the beautiful killer E: Yes!
21. Two JB's slightly blurred as camera moves	Swoop to close up of two JBs opposite	E: I recognise you, guys
22. E toasting	E close up	E: Cheers. To killers!
23. Left side profile of another JB smiling. Raises full glass and drinks.	Close up of another JB	JBs (toasting): To killers!
24. Original JB in tight profile with two others (one being E) whose hands we can see out of focus as they drink	Camera pans left to original JB	

Description of shot	Camera	Dialogue/Sounds
25. E smiling	Camera pans to E	E: If you need a coach, I'm your girl. JB: OK
26. JB close up	Camera back to first JB	JB: How many people have you killed?
27. E facing forward with JB on right laughing in direction of colleagues. As she speaks E nods seriously	Camera back to E	E: Just one so far JB: Just one, she's a beginner. E: Yeah, but I kill him for real.
28. JB turns serious. Shakes head slightly left to right.	Close up on JB	
29. E facing forward and smiling with JB in profile looking at E. E looks down to pick up glass.	Close up to E	
30. Two younger JB's lean toward each other in in conversation	Close up on two of the younger JBs	E: To lean management
31. Hands with glasses charged raised in toast	Close up on one JB's arm, hand and glass	JBs: To lean management. Clinking sounds
32. E leaning forward for another toast	Close up on E	E: To Stéphane Foucard
33. Two younger managers again	Close up on two younger managers, now not smiling	
34. E raises glass and drinks. JB looking serious turns left to colleagues. He turns back to E who smiles as she starts swallowing her drink down, then raises glass again.	Close up on E with JB to right	E: He's my boss, my master, my commander. E: To Didier Dalmat!
35. JB looking very serious and concerned	Close up of JB with colleague to his right leaning forward and slightly out of focus	JB to E (off): Are you OK?

Description of shot	Camera	Dialogue/Sounds
36. E takes another drink from glass. JB looks on	Close up on E	E: To him.
37. Street outside bar. E on pavement alone is on right, leaning forward into the road throwing up. She is near a T junction. E pulls herself back, gasping and clasping her stomach	Street scene E in medium shot	Noise of E throwing up. Traffic passes on road behind.

APPENDIX 2

Isabelle Sorente's play, *Hard copy* (English trans. Martin Goodman)

Premiered in St Albans and Camden, London by the Company of Ten, at the Abbey Theatre and the People's Theatre, respectively in June 2019.

Version 09/06/2018

Cast

Four women work for the Group on exactly the same grade.

BLANCHE, married to Didier with a young adolescent son and a small daughter

DOUCE, married to Jean-Marc with a young adolescent son and a small daughter

ROSE, married to Jacques with a young adolescent son and a small daughter

BELLE, married to Yves with a young adolescent son and a small daughter

As they arrive at the office, three of the women greet each other with a kiss. Rose arrives a little after the others. It is very important that the four women are dressed and made up in exactly the same way, with the same hairstyle. All four are from the same social background and share the same lifestyle. They are all part of the same office team.

DOUCE: Hi there.

BLANCHE: Hi there, sweetheart, you OK?

DOUCE: Yes, and you?

BELLE: Good morning girls, did you have a good weekend?

BLANCHE: Wonderful, I went with Didier to visit the chateaux on the Loire.

DOUCE: I did that with Jean-Marc two years ago.

Rose enters

ROSE: Good morning girls.

BLANCHE: Hi there.

BELLE: Did you have a good weekend?

ROSE: Yes, we took a trip around the chateaux on the Loire.

BLANCHE: No, you're joking? Just like us.

ROSE: What a shame, if I'd know we could have met up.

BELLE: I do like your makeup.

ROSE: Thanks, it's the new 'Magnetic Blue' eyeliner. You know, the one that's advertised on TV.

BLANCHE: It really is pretty.

BELLE: Yours isn't bad either, what is it?

BLANCHE: 'Overseas magic'. It's from last year.

BELLE: It's unusual. A bit quirky, but unusual.

ROSE: It suits you. OK girls, shall I put on the coffee?

BELLE: I need some. I was awake most of the night.

DOUCE: Me too. Little one woke us four times.

BELLE: They're awful at that age.

BLANCHE: The fourth time she cried, Didier's the one that got up.

DOUCE: Men really ought to do more.

BLANCHE: Yes, but being a mother is really the best job.

BELLE: Being a mother and staying a lover.

ROSE: You always have to work at being a couple.

BLANCHE: Just the same, you mustn't forget your career.

ROSE: Here we are girls, coffee is ready. How are the older kids?

BLANCHE: Thomas is about to join one of the top year eight classes.

DOUCE: Just like Yann.

ROSE: Fabien plans to make German his first language.

DOUCE: Children are such a responsibility.

BELLE: Just like the human body.

ROSE: I go to the gym twice a week, you know.

DOUCE: Me too, Thursday evenings and Sunday mornings. I don't do Saturdays because they're for shopping. And in the evening Jean-Marc and I have our private time.

BELLE: Staying seductive is really important.

BLANCHE: And being a good mother at the same time.

ROSE: 'A maid in the living room, a cook in the kitchen and a whore in the bedroom'

DOUCE: Why do you say that?

ROSE: What do you mean?

DOUCE: Just what you said.

BLANCHE: It wasn't very nice.

BELLE: A bit crude.

DOUCE: That's it. That's the word.

ROSE: But it's just an expression. It doesn't come from me. It's a well-known expression. It's part of the language.

BLANCHE: I don't understand.

BELLE: Me neither.

DOUCE: Nor me, I must say.

ROSE: 'A maid in the living room, a cook in the kitchen and a whore in the bedroom.' It's a well-known expression. It already exists. It's like, I don't know, 'six of one and half-a-dozen of the other'.

DOUCE: That's completely different.

BELLE: What's that got to do with it?

ROSE: All right. Let's say, 'from start to finish'.

BELLE: That's no clearer either.

BLANCHE: I can't keep up.

ROSE: Well, you explain it then.

DOUCE: It would be better not to explain anything.

ROSE: Look, what I wanted to say is that it wasn't me who invented it. The words have already been put together in the language. That's all. That's the way it was even before I said a word.

DOUCE: So it wasn't your fault. OK.

BLANCHE: Well then.

DOUCE: Anyway, I see you've had your hair done?

ROSE: Yes. *(She waits for a compliment that doesn't come.)*

BLANCHE: It's bound to be more practical.

BELLE: Long hair's lovely, but it's difficult to manage.

DOUCE: You know, I wash mine with fruit acid shampoo. It's crazy the amount I spend on all kinds of cream.

BLANCHE: It shows. Your hair looks amazing.

BELLE: She's right Douce, your hair is very beautiful.

DOUCE: It's already half-past, Rose, would you fetch the post please.

ROSE: Of course.

BLANCHE: Are you OK, Douce?

BELLE: You look a bit upset.

DOUCE: It's nothing. I don't want to be nasty, but still, I find Rose quite unpleasant this morning.

BLANCHE: Really? I'm sure what she said wasn't meant.

DOUCE: Yes, I'm sure you're right.

BELLE: Anyway, you haven't asked me what I did at the weekend.

BLANCHE: Hey, you're right. So, what did you do?

BELLE: I went to my Catholic support association for the homeless. It takes guts, you know, to love those who suffer. Some of them are aggressive. But you just need to understand them. Why wouldn't they be? They don't have a bean. Anyway, that's what I did. All Sunday.

DOUCE: You served them meals all day?

BELLE: No. You haven't asked me what I was doing.

DOUCE: OK. So what were you doing?

BELLE: I sacrificed my body so that these men, forgotten by their fellow men and by society, might rediscover ecstasy. To sleep with a clean woman who has a good job, with just a minimum of instruction.

BLANCHE: That sounds horrendous.

BELLE: No. They're young. They're free. Like children who've just taken a shower.

DOUCE: You know, Jean-Marc and I made love on Sunday, after lunch. The problem was I'd eaten too much Pavlova and he had me while I was still digesting my food. I had stomachache all afternoon, right up to the political broadcast at seven o'clock. I was very stoical about the whole thing. Don't complain, that's one of the things I've learnt.

BELLE: I had to give relief to eight tramps. I was really pushed by the end of the day. It was six o'clock. I had to get home to prepare dinner, so I made love to the last three at the same time. It wasn't my fault. But I still feel guilty.

BLANCHE: I don't understand.

DOUCE: You know Blanche, about Rose, I'm sure you're right, she didn't mean it.

BLANCHE: What?

DOUCE: Those nasty and vulgar things she said earlier. It's just like the time she said you were disorganised. Obviously, she wasn't thinking. She wouldn't hurt a fly.

BLANCHE: *(Annoyed)* Maybe. In any case, she is a bit odd.

BELLE: Why did she say that? She sounds so smug whenever she speaks.

Rose re-enters carrying some post.

ROSE (*Handing out the post*): That's for you, and here's my pile. Good luck, girls.

BLANCHE: Excuse me, may I just say something?

ROSE: Of course.

BLANCHE: Promise me you won't get annoyed.

ROSE: Of course I won't.

BLANCHE: You'd look better if you didn't have your blouse tucked into your skirt.

DOUCE: She's right.

BELLE: Yes, I agree.

ROSE: But why?

BELLE: Because the colours of your skirt and your blouse, I don't want to be nasty, but they clash terribly. They're not at all the same shade of black.

DOUCE: She's right. Either you buy them together, in which case both shades are completely identical, or you opt for a skirt and a blouse that are different, in which case you need to make sure they go together.

BLANCHE: Anyway, it's not the end of the world.

ROSE: Good, if you say so. Thanks girls.

BLANCHE, DOUCE *and* BELLE *together*: Think nothing of it.

Time passes during which they each get on with their jobs.

DOUCE: You're not sulking, I hope.

ROSE: Me? Not at all.

DOUCE: Ah, good. It's just that I had the impression …

ROSE: No, I assure you.

DOUCE: Just as well.

BLANCHE: It would be so stupid to start sulking over a comment like that.

BELLE: Anyway girls, have you tasted that new range of diet meals?

DOUCE: The ones with bits of apple?

BELLE: Yes, that's the ones.

BLANCHE: You know, they're not bad. My problem is that I eat too many. I eat one, I eat two, and then I've eaten the entire box. Then, I feel so fat, so ugly. I say to myself: 'You're even uglier and fatter than you were before.' Miserable body.

BELLE: Bloody miserable body.

ROSE: It's true that the diet meal with apple is good, but I prefer the one with chocolate.

DOUCE: You've got no taste.

ROSE: That's nice. You didn't say that when I bought you a Lacroix Bazar blouse for your birthday.

DOUCE: There's no point being nasty. I was pulling your leg. But then it's not very nice to bring up the price of a gift you've given.

BLANCHE: It's petty. Honestly Rose, I would never have expected it of you.

ROSE: Hang on, I wasn't saying that I was sorry to have given Douce the blouse.

DOUCE: Then what did you mean?

ROSE: I was just saying …

BLANCHE: That she owes you something because you bought her a blouse. That joking around's no longer allowed.

Douce and Belle laugh.

BELLE: Stop now. Look she'll only take it badly again. It's not a big thing, Rose. She was just joking.

DOUCE: Everyone knows you're not stingy, you even live a little beyond your means and, admit it, you just wanted to show off what you'd bought. *(She laughs.)*

ROSE *with a forced laugh*: You exaggerate.

DOUCE: Come on, we all know you didn't mean it. We were just poking fun!

BLANCHE: You shouldn't be so touchy, Rose. Your work colleagues, who you're with eight hours a day, need to think like a team as a minimum, otherwise the atmosphere would be just horrible.

BELLE: It's important to give to others. Give and give again. Just like me on Sunday, when …

DOUCE: OK, Belle. Having a sense of humour, Rose, excuses everything. Everything, believe me. It's one of the key things I learnt at the scouts.

BELLE: Tell us about the scouts. You never do.

DOUCE: There's nothing special about the scouts.

BLANCHE: Obviously.

DOUCE: One evening, we organised a huge rally. We lit a bonfire of joy, right in the middle of the campsite to illuminate this huge rally with the flame of our goodwill.

BELLE: How lovely.

DOUCE: A great bonfire. A great joy. ‘I have known on this campsite great joys and lasting friendships.’ That’s what the mayor of Châlon-on-the-Marne said in his speech to the rally. They held it on an army campsite. *(Little by little she loses herself in her memory. It’s not a pleasant memory.)* Great joys and lasting friendships.

BLANCHE (*to the other two*): Once again, she’s not going to tell us.

DOUCE (*happy to change the subject*): Even so, Rose, you didn’t need to say that.

ROSE (*lifting her head from her work*): What?

DOUCE: ‘A maid in the living room, a cook in the kitchen and a whore in the bedroom’

BLANCHE AND BELLE (*disgusted*): Ah!

ROSE: But I’ve already said, it’s just an expression.

DOUCE: But those words, I tell you frankly to hear them uttered between your tiny red lips, they sounded just hideous. Your tiny, synthetic, fake lips.

ROSE (*forcing herself to laugh*): You’ve quite a sense of humour, haven’t you?

BLANCHE: Rose, I wouldn’t take that tone, if I were you.

ROSE: But what’s changed since this morning? If I don’t defend myself, exactly like I did earlier, you criticise me for not having a sense of humour. But now when I laugh, and that’s no good either. You treat me like a loser who can’t defend herself, is that it?

BLANCHE: That’s nonsense. I was talking to you out of friendship.

ROSE: Well, your kind of friendship distresses me. I’ve read about this kind of thing in an article the other day. It’s called double bind.

DOUCE: Double what?

ROSE: Double bind. It means things people say that contradict one another. It sends people mad. Tonight, you tell your husband you’re going out with friends, he says: ‘If you want’, but he scowls at you, so can see actually he’s pissed. So you ask: ‘Does it bother you if I go out without you?’. ‘I didn’t say that’, he says. So you don’t know any more whether if you go out you'd wish you hadn't; or if you stay in, you'll wish you hadn't either. That's double bind.

DOUCE: That's a bit tortuous.

BLANCHE: What's that got to do with us?

DOUCE: Do you take us for monsters?

BELLE: Or weirdoes?

BLANCHE: All right, Belle.

ROSE: No, she's right, I'm really sorry, girls. I don't know why I'm so upset.

DOUCE: Perhaps you need a holiday.

BLANCHE: That's true. You don't look well.

BELLE: You've got dark circles under your eyes too. That's worrying.

ROSE: I don't know what to say.

*v*OICE OF DIRECTOR: Rose, would you come to my office, please?

ROSE: Yes, sir, I'm right on my way. Girls, I've got to go. Please forgive me. I'm a bit edgy at the moment.

DOUCE: So we see.

Rose exits

BLANCHE: That girl's got a problem.

BELLE: With her husband no doubt.

DOUCE: Marital problems are very serious.

BELLE: It's such a shame.

BLANCHE: There's definitely something going on there, a personal problem, very specific, very psychological. I'm sensitive. These things don't escape me, you know.

DOUCE: Didn't you say that she's never once arrived on time in two years?

BELLE: Yes, it's true. You think it's a symptom of some illness? There are a lot of people who arrive late.

BLANCHE: Yes, but arriving late all the time, that's something else. I believe that it's a sign of deep contempt for others. Just as compulsive behaviours are a sign of sensitivity, or even a certain fragility. I'm thinking of other types of dependence, like smoking, drinking alcohol and *(timidly)* overeating. *(Checks herself as she sees the other two looking at her in an odd way.)* But I don’t arrive late to work.

DOUCE: And yet, we have as many things to do in the morning as she does.

BELLE: Exactly the same things. Take a shower. Wake the children. Make breakfast.

DOUCE: Makeup. Spread blue makeup on the eyelids.

BLANCHE: You’ve got to admit that the eye makeup is not good quality. The blue is too blue, so that by this evening they’ll be blue wrinkles on the wrinkles of my eyelids.

BELLE: I hope I never grow old.

BLANCHE: Whatever happens, nothing lasts, you know, just as you know it’s not good to put on makeup under electric light. It makes your cheeks look too red, old woman’s cheeks. But it’s so early, you don’t have a choice, it’s neon or nothing. And then, who are you trying to please anyway?

DOUCE: Sport’s also important.

BELLE: I go twice a week to the gym.

DOUCE: Every morning I do three minutes of exercises on the bedroom carpet to strengthen my abs and glutes.

BLANCHE: Me too, Didier says I look like a cockroach stamping its tiny feet. It seems that cockroaches are one of the toughest forms of life.

DOUCE: I’m really terrified of insects. I’m really scared of these tiny lives that go so quickly.

BELLE: For me it’s the opposite, their swarming fascinates me.

DOUCE: Let’s drop the subject if you don’t mind. By the way, can’t you smell something funny?

BELLE: You’re right.

BLANCHE: I’ve got the feeling it’s coming from Rose’s desk.

BELLE: It must be her perspiration. Come to think of it her blouse is synthetic.

DOUCE: Well, if it's not cotton …. Personally, I can only wear natural fibres. Cotton, linen, and silk if I need to.

BELLE: Silk makes you perspire.

DOUCE: I suppose one of your little tramps told you that on Sunday, didn't they?

BELLE: Not at all. Yves bought me a top. I perspired all summer.

BLANCHE: Summer's different. It's not clever to wear synthetics, if you perspire all year round.

DOUCE: Hang on, I'll go over to her desk to check. Oh, it's true, it stinks.

BELLE: What'll we do? It's hard working in these conditions.

DOUCE: Don't get yourself into a state, that won't get us anywhere, you know.

We should get Rose some deodorant, yes I think that would be best. We should also suggest she stops wearing synthetics. Tactfully of course. It won't be easy.

BELLE: Who's going to buy the deodorant then?

BLANCHE: We've already bought her some deodorant. Don't you remember? We need to find the words to tell her she smells. All this effort is unbelievable. The attention this girl attracts, it's fascinating. But this fascination isn't two way, she never thinks about you when you think about her. You can be sure of that.

DOUCE: That's true. She must be very self-centered. But it's no surprise, she's always been like that.

BLANCHE: It can't last forever.

DOUCE: I've bought some air freshener. I'll put it on her desk where she can see it.

BELLE: That's a good idea.

DOUCE: *Approaching Rose's desk to put down the air freshener*: Well, here's the Fontenel file. It looks like she's not checked it in yet. I'll deal with it myself. (*she carries the file to her desk.)*

BLANCHE: Hey, don't you think she's been in the Director's office for a long time?

DOUCE: That's true.

BELLE: What do you think she is doing?

BLANCHE: Same as we would.

BELLE: What's that?

DOUCE: She's right. We all do it, don't we?

BLANCHE: My last time was Wednesday 7th.

DOUCE: And mine was Friday 9th.

BLANCHE: He said, 'Blanche, would you just fetch me the Jacquemin file?'

DOUCE: He said, 'Come in Douce' to me.

BLANCHE: Do come in Douce. Put the file on the desk. Take off your skirt and your synthetic panties. Your stomach is beautiful. Even your cellulite is beautiful.

DOUCE: He said: 'Your bra isn't very clean'.

BLANCHE: 'Your bra isn't very clean. But I just love your vanilla perfume'.

DOUCE: He said: 'What would you like me to do you today'.

BLANCHE: What would you like me to do to you today? You love dirty words, don't you?

DOUCE: Yes, Mr. Director.

BLANCHE: *affectionately*: Slut.

DOUCE: Bitch.

BLANCHE: *same tone*: Little bitch.

DOUCE: He says she's worthless.

BLANCHE: You're worthless. On your knees.

DOUCE: Yes. Under the desk.

BLANCHE: Under the desk. Take off your trousers.

DOUCE: He says suck me.

BLANCHE: Suck me. My whore, my little devil, eat me, Marilyn … … Rita, Sharon, Uma, Gina, Marisa, eat me, Colette, Marguerite, Anita!

DOUCE: *interrupting and leaving the game*: That's enough. You gone too far. I can't identify with it anymore.

BLANCHE: Excuse me.

DOUCE: And you're mixing up things.

BLANCHE: What do you mean, mixing up?

DOUCE: You've no right to mix up actresses with writers.

BELLE: She's right. That's not in the rules.

DOUCE: It's not surprising I couldn't follow what was going on. I'm a good player. Because normally you'd never even have had the right to mix American with Spanish actresses.

BLANCHE: It's just a game Douce.

DOUCE: Even a game needs basic rules. Without rules you can't do anything. It's like a society that's lost its values.

BELLE: That would be terrible. Anyway in my case, on Sunday it wasn't a game. It was just like that, but all true.

DOUCE: Watch out, here she comes.

Rose returns, her arms loaded with files.

ROSE: Hi girls, what have you been talking about? You look like, I don't know, like naughty children maybe.

Blanche, Belle and Douce look at each other and giggle

ROSE: Very well, back to work then. Lift up your hearts as they say in the scouts.

DOUCE: Ah ah, that's cute.

ROSE: (*sees the deodorant on her desk)* What's this? (*Pause in which none of the other three answer.)* Who put that on my desk?

BLANCHE: *to Belle and loud enough for Rose to hear*: She's completely paranoid.

DOUCE: That's OK Rose. I did it for you. In your interest. If you carry on like that I'll end up thinking what everyone else thinks about you.

ROSE: *looking at the others*: What everyone thinks about me?

DOUCE: Look, I don’t agree with them. I just pity you. Pity is a virtue that I was taught. I think that if you buy bad quality clothes, it’s because you don’t have the money to buy anything else. But you’re simply not aware of the smells.

ROSE: *feeling humiliated*: Smells?

DOUCE: Yes, smells from perspiration. You know, without searching out pricey brands, it’s quite possible to find the right cotton clothes at a lower price.

BLANCHE: T shirts, for instance. Don’t fret Rose. What she said was for your own good.

ROSE: *with and effort*: Yes, of course. I’ll take it on board.

DOUCE: Everything will sort itself out.

BLANCHE: It’s always better to say something.

BELLE: You think?

DOUCE: Of course, Belle. We spend eight hours together, you’d want us to say something, wouldn’t you. To let things deteriorate without saying anything. It’s poison silence, in a team.

ROSE: I’m still part of the team, despite the smells? (*forces herself to laugh)*

DOUCE: Yes, of course.

BLANCHE: Rose, what an idea.

BELLE: (*to herself)*: I don’t know why, I was thinking of this story my grandmother told me, the story of her cousins who took the mickey out of an apprentice in a garage in Tunis, they were all 12 years old while the apprentice was 18 but simple minded. Anyway, my grandmother said he was alone while there were eight of them. One day they wanted to know if this idiot could be pumped up like a tyre, if they stuck the end of the hose between his buttocks. So they pulled the idiot’s overalls down and they pumped. ‘He died’, my grandmother concluded. She added: ‘All his intestines exploded, poor boy’. I never understood why she didn’t say “the poor idiot” or “the poor victim” . And why is the word ‘victim’ feminine in French?

BLANCHE: Anyway, Rose, you could just change when it's midday. You'll have time, there's an hour for lunch.

ROSE: *hesitantly*: Good. OK.

DOUCE: *affectionately to Blanche*: See, you're exaggerating.

BLANCHE: Why, her smells are bothering us, aren't they? I'm just saying aloud what everyone else is muttering. That's all.

BELLE: Like Le Pen with immigrants.

BLANCHE: (*annoyed)*: That's got nothing to do with it. I vote for the left you know. I was being completely selfless. But I'm worried about everyone else. There are worse sacrifices than giving up your lunch break for the common wellbeing. A simple return ticket would change everything. (*turning towards Rose).* You can see Barrier doesn't understand.

Rose gives a jump on hearing her surname spoken.

BELLE: She's got dandruff, have you noticed?

ROSE: I wash my hair every other day! And in any case, it's not true, I've no more dandruff than you!

BLANCHE: What did I tell you? You can't even talk to her anymore.

BELLE: Why are you attacking me Rose?

ROSE: I'm not attacking anyone. I'm just saying it's not true, that I don't have dandruff.

BELLE: You've got it because you're stressed. Stop scratching, that's all.

DOUCE and BLANCHE laugh

ROSE: You really are all so pitiful!

DOUCE: Now look here, Rose, you go too far. You really think that we're the ones who are pitiful?

BLANCHE: Are we the ones who arrived late every morning for two years?

DOUCE: She's insulting us, with all we've done for her. Everything we've done for you, Rose.

ROSE: *(less and less assured)*: And what exactly have you done for me?

BLANCHE: We think about you, we talk to you, much more than you actually talk to us. Can't you see that?

ROSE: No.

BELLE: (*puzzled)*: Seriously?

DOUCE: Yes. It threatens our ability to work together. As a team.

ROSE: I must have done something without noticing. Obviously. I'll speak to them, we'll get to the bottom of it and everything will be OK.

BLANCHE, DOUCE and BELLE whisper while looking at Rose.

BELLE: Maybe she's got a problem.

DOUCE: That's no excuse.

BLANCHE: What she said, the way she spoke to you Belle. She hates us, that's obvious. I must admit that scares me.

ROSE: *(alone at her desk)*: I'll speak to them and everything will be all right. It's just like when I'm with Jacques. Sometimes, what he says, really hurts. I don't think he does it deliberately. I don't know, I'm not sure, who's at fault, is it the words themselves or the sense of injury? It seems to me I'm getting all the blame. An egotistical monster, Jacques says. You never put yourself in other people's shoes. You only think of yourself. I must speak to them, but say what?

BELLE: It's terrible, hatred, but it's not the opposite of love.

BLANCHE: *(confused)*: What are you saying, Belle? That I've never known love?

BELLE: No. It's just a Buddhist proverb, fear is the opposite of love. Or maybe it's something else.

BLANCHE: So you're a Buddhist? Do you believe in reincarnation? Isn't one life enough for you?

DOUCE: Whatever she believes in, good for her. Personally I don't believe in anything, I just go along with the basic rules. The less I believe, the more these rules seem important. I'm a vegetarian. I only eat vegetables and whole grain rice. Sometimes, I allow myself something extra, on Sundays.

BELLE: I'm not Buddhist, Blanche, I'm Christian.

DOUCE: Last Sunday, I ate too much Stilton, so that when Jean-Marc climbed on top of me, I was still having problems digesting it. He certainly didn't come. I had a terrible tummy ache.

BELLE: Personally, I could never be a vegetarian. I like meat too much.

BLANCHE: *(to Belle)*: I don't know why, when you say that, I want to slap you.

BELLE: *(with a smile)*: You've got Rose for that.

BLANCHE: And I took you for an idiot.

DOUCE: Please, let's not argue. The atmosphere is already horrible enough with her sniveling in the corner. It's worrying she's crying. She must be very troubled. We'd best try to ignore her, that's less cruel. Were you listening to me just now? I was saying that last Sunday, I had a tummy ache. I was lying. I didn't actually have a tummy ache.

BLANCHE: What?

DOUCE: I don't come. I'm dry inside. As dry as a date.

BELLE: Dates are also sweet, you know.

ROSE: I must speak to them. Maybe the coffee was too weak. No, that's stupid. When we did some brainstorming last week, I cut Douce off and challenged her forecasts. That's it. I didn't give it too much thought. Can't see in front of my own nose, as Jacques says.

DOUCE: Jean-Marc gets hard. He doesn't care. Whether I'm aroused or not, Jean-Marc couldn't care less. He's got his technique. Oh yes, he's OK.

BELLE: Men sometimes forget the preliminaries.

BLANCHE: In which case, the woman should say something. You must say what you want, Douce.

BELLE: Sex, it's just words.

DOUCE: I've said nothing for fifteen years. Fifteen years pretending, without saying anything.

BELLE: Faking it isn't the answer.

ROSE: I wonder if happiness exists, anywhere. No-one seems to know what it is, in Mexico or Mumbai. In ten years ninety per cent of humanity will live in enormous cities. The rest will die in the desert.

BELLE: *(pretending to be an agony aunt)*: Dear Douce. Your letter really shocked me.

DOUCE: Don't make a joke of it, Belle. I could kill someone.

BELLE: *(same game)*: Dear reader, your worries are shared by many women. I'd advise you to speak to your husband when you are alone at dinner.

BLANCHE: *(same game)*: During this moment of intimacy it's up to you to take steps towards happiness. Don't hesitate to write to me again.

ROSE: We must talk. *(silence)*

DOUCE: *(dryly)*: Really? About what?

ROSE: I'm very sorry about last Sunday, Douce. *(she smiles)*: I'm sorry, it won't happen again.

DOUCE: *(to Blanche and Belle)*: What's she talking about?

ROSE: *(very quickly)*: I don't know what I've done, but whatever it is, I apologise, I'm very sorry. Please forgive me. I promise I'll try harder when it comes to the dandruff and the cotton blouses.

BLANCHE: It's so depressing to see someone who let's herself get pushed around like this.

DOUCE: I don't believe she'll ever get promoted.

BLANCHE: You're right. The Group needs leaders.

ROSE: Will you just listen to me!

BELLE: She's let herself go.

ROSE: Have I done or said something to upset you?

BELLE: Even her body's a sad thing.

ROSE: I'm tired.

BLANCHE: She's always tired. Always complaining, she should sort herself out.

BELLE: Maybe it's not worth bothering about?

DOUCE: I can't stand people like her. I like people with strong characters, real personalities. No-one's ever needed to trouble themselves about me, it never occurs to me to complain.

BLANCHE: Personally, it's easy, I never get tired. When you get the chance to travel for the Group, you can't allow yourself to get tired. So, I take a cocktail of vitamins. It says on the jar "for travel fatigue in adults". I take them every day, up to retirement if I need to.

BELLE: I suppose that's a kind of journey.

ROSE: I must be ill. My left eyelid keeps twitching. It's true I am tired. I want to sleep, but I can't, because this eyelid is driving me mad, just the one, by itself. I need to see a doctor. I've got to get out of here.

BLANCHE: I'd really like to go far, but not like poor Barrier here. You know, the Director said to me: "Blanche, you'll go far." That was last week, I stayed here until eleven o'clock to finish work on the file he entrusted to me, not to anyone else, he insisted on that, with his phony smile, you know the sort, the one he always uses at six thirty on Friday evenings. "Blanche, I put my trust in you. Completing this file is on your shoulders". He called me by my first name, I thought, he always does that, so I smiled and finished the job. I wonder if he really believes that I'll work myself to the bone for a few nice words.

DOUCE: You don't have a choice, neither does he. He believes it, so do you. He called you by your first name, you smiled. You're even. Why bother to complain?

BELLE: (*looking at Rose stretched out on the floor, face down)*: She really doesn't look well. Maybe we went too far?

DOUCE: I never complain, I know it's a waste of time. Tiredness is a funny thing, I don't feel it here, but holidays exhaust me. Once we are there I spend the day cooking, making meals, almost nothing but it all seems worse. My little girl doesn't stop crying all day, then every evening after dinner there's Jean-Marc with his technique. Then he falls asleep. I can't sleep. I can hear a cricket; the sound comes from outside.

I remember when I was the same age as my son, I would listen to a cricket in my grandfather's garden, I'd see myself in an evening dress with a man kissing me, and that image was enough, that image would have sustained me to carry on. Now when I hear the cricket, there's no feeling, nothing. It doesn't work anymore. When I first realised that, then it was over, the image had gone forever, I felt hatred. I can crave many things, when in those moments when I can't sleep. I can wish Jean-Marc dead. Or that my child's heart, my little girl, who still knows nothing of lost images that her heart would simply stop beating. So I get up, I go to the bathroom to see whether all this hatred shows. No. It doesn't.

BELLE: I assure you, Douce, it doesn't show. (*she looks at Rose*) You know she really doesn't look well.

BLANCHE: Douce doesn't look too good either. You should stay active, Douce, even when you can't sleep. Personally, I often get insomnia because of the vitamin cocktails. But at night, I don't waste time. I read essays on global economics. I don't like novels, I don't like being told stories. (*looks at Rose*) I wonder what she's thinking? What are you thinking Barrier? Are you dreaming? Barrier! She hears me but she doesn't answer. Maybe she has got guts.

ROSE: It's my eyelid. It won't stop twitching. It's troubling me so much I can't hear what you're saying. It's worrying me. Maybe it's serious. I need to see a doctor. (*pause, still talking to herself*) Why do they keep saying my name like that? Barrier. It's not even my name, it's Jacques.

BELLE: Do you ever read novels, Blanche?

BLANCHE: No, I'm not interested. Work doesn't give me enough time. If they reduced staff numbers it won't be me who gets sacked.

DOUCE: They've got to reduce staff numbers?

ROSE: Listen to me! I don't know what's going on anymore, I think I've got a problem with Jacques.

BELLE: Does he make you come?

ROSE: No, that's not it. I'm feeling really odd. (*Blanche and Douce look at one another, they shrug).* I don't know what I'm seeing. *(to Belle)* Take your skirt, for instance, it's black. There's no doubt about it, and that should be enough. But for me it isn't. You see, Belle, if you were now to tell me that my skirt isn't black, it's red, there you go! You'd say it in such a way as if it were an obvious fact with just a hint of mockery to scare me, my skirt isn't black it's red, don't you see? Well, I'd doubt it. Perhaps I'd think you were indeed right. And then obviously, that you're the one who sees clearly. So I'd say to myself, yes, this skirt is red.

DOUCE: *(to Blanche)*: How come you know about the plans for staff cuts?

BLANCHE: The Director told me. He said: 'I'm telling you before it becomes official.

Blanche, I know you're discreet'.

DOUCE: I suppose he said it with that idiotic grin he uses on Fridays at 6.30.

BLANCHE: Exactly.

ROSE: Jacques said you're so stupid. And I believe it. You get stupid, you know, when you no longer doubt anything, when you completely wipe out any doubt. He asks me if I've come, I say I don't know. Then he says, you're so stupid.

BLANCHE: That's very sad Rose. But this is a workplace. We talk in a professional manner. Emotional issues must be restricted to what is strictly necessary.

BELLE: Necessary for what?

BLANCHE: Profitability.

DOUCE: She's right, Belle. Management's planning to cut the size of the team.

BELLE: One of us?

BLANCHE: Yes.

BELLE: That's unfair. We all do a good job.

DOUCE: *(Looking towards Rose)*: All of us?

BLANCHE: We must be realistic Belle, it's the law of the market. We don't live in an ideal world. Only the strongest survive. The weakest are automatically cast aside from the road to success. Life's a jungle. World hunger. Car accidents. Grief.

BELLE: I'm not wearing my panties today. What you think about it is neither here nor there. (*Blanche and Douce remain silent. Belle approaches Rose who's flat out face down).* Are you all right, Rose? Are you crying? We've not hurt you, have we? I don't even know how this has all happened. Since this morning. It feels like a machine that's out of control. (*she leans over her, kisses her. Rose sobs).* What's the problem, what harm have I done you?

ROSE: Why did you do that?

BELLE: What do you mean?

ROSE: Kiss me? Why?

BELLE: I don't know. To comfort you.

ROSE: Am I so pitiful?

BELLE: No.

BLANCHE: *(to Douce)* Belle shouldn't be talking to her.

ROSE: If you're kissing me, Belle, things must be really serious. Since this morning people have turned against me. You say you don't understand, but you do. I've a feeling that words have gone crazy, they're smashing into each other, they can only be used to say evil things. These words are aimed at me, you say you don't understand, but you kissed me. Until a few minutes ago I was able to force myself to be reasonable, to tell myself that it was all in head, they've not done anything bad, they're just messing about. But if you're apologising, then those words must really have done their job well.

BELLE: Yes, exactly.

ROSE: Stop talking, Belle.

BELLE: I don't understand. I'm trying to help you.

ROSE: Words have gone crazy, even if you believe what you're saying, I can hear you laughing at me. Not a word. No-one can help me anymore.

DOUCE: You hear that?

BLANCHE: She's bonkers. She's been like that from the very start, we just didn't realise.

BELLE: You're lying. You want to persuade yourself because you're scared of her.

BLANCHE: You too, you must be scared, just like everyone else. The economic situation is deplorable.

DOUCE: Look Rose, as you were tired, I finished the work on the Fontenel file for you.

ROSE: But it was finished!

DOUCE: Yes, it's completed.

ROSE: You want credit for my work!

DOUCE: It's all our work, isn't it Blanche?

BLANCHE: Of course.

DOUCE: Isn't that so, Belle? (*Belle doesn't answer*) Isn't that so, Belle? Belle, a door must be open or shut. If you don't want to be part of the team, tell us now, then everything will be clear.

BLANCHE: We won't get mad at you.

DOUCE: But think about what Blanche said just now. Yves doesn't earn that much. I'm sure you're happy to bring home a second income, as it's called.

BELLE: So it's the moment of truth, is that it? I don't give a monkey's about this job. Every minute I spend here, I dream of being elsewhere. I wanted to be an actor, but it didn't work out. No use complaining, is there Douce? Does all this hatred show? I'm joking, of course. It's the day for making jokes. The Fontenel file is the work of the four of us.

(They all stare at Rose. Silence. Rose's telephone rings on her desk.)

ROSE: Hello. Good morning. M. Dufour.

BLANCHE *imitating her*: Good morning. M. Dufour.

ROSE: It's nothing. People in the office. Absolutely, I've dealt with your order.

I gave it priority.

DOUCE: (*very loudly)*: You speak about priority!

ROSE: No sir. My colleagues are just teasing me, friendship, you know. Why do I let them? That's not really important, sir. I'm in a hurry to take your order, that's all … I'm making a note of it, yes, 30th of June at the latest.

BELLE: *(softly to the others)*: You know I had sex with Dufour?

BLANCHE: (*same tone)*: No? Do tell.

BELLE: A couple of weeks ago, I came back to the office very late, because I'd forgotten my red cardigan on my chair, and I really needed to wear it the next day. And then, who do you think I bumped into coming out of the Director's office?

Dufour. He looked at me. I looked at him. Very calmly he lifted up my skirt, the black one I wear on Fridays. Just like that. I found him to be a good lover, for a man in a hurry.

BLANCHE: *(very loudly)*: Rose, is that man on the phone in a hurry?

(Douce and Belle laugh)

ROSE: But M.Dufour, I didn't say anything! I didn't say anything. It's my colleague, Blanche. No, I'm not telling on her. There's a real plot against me here. Are you listening? They're stealing my files, sabotaging my phone conversations. Who? Well, the entire team, sir. I'm so happy to talk to someone. At least you've recognised my capabilities for a long time … some mistakes? … a question of competence? What do you mean a question of competence, M.Dufour? You're not joining in as well, are you? Did they call you or what? No, I'm not paranoid. You've been hassling me on the phone for two years. So you can check the same details on thirty times a day, asking the same questions, as if that's going to resolve your financial problems, M.Dufour! Are you the one who's treating me as paranoid? … *(pause)* M.Dufour? I'm really sorry I wasn't thinking. Yes, of course. *(strained)* I'll pass you to someone who's competent.

Douce grabs the phone

DOUCE: *(smiling)*: Good morning, M.Dufour. I'm so terribly sorry. Of course not, I've nothing to do with it, but we are a team. We are as one. Yes, I was in the scouts! You too? Ah, the campsites, those yogurts past their sell by dates, the spit on the water flasks … yes, we've drifted off the point. I was just trying to move forward … Her? She's ill, it's very serious, but we've taken her under our wing. Obviously, incompetent. But we just get on with it. (*she thinks about what she is saying)* When we need to be kind, we are not silly about it … You're right … Sometimes generosity and acts of kindness must give way to the needs of management efficiency. That's very well said, M.Dufour. You don't mind if I write that down? Allow me to use it in the future. Yes, I'll check on your order. I'll take charge of it personally. I'll call you in two hours to bring you up to date. That's the least I can do. Goodbye, M.Dufour. Right away. Have a good day. Yes. Goodbye. *(puts phone down)*. There you go. The worst has been averted. What pressure, my God, what pressure!

BLANCHE: It's important to be able to work under pressure, Douce.

DOUCE: It must be awful to crack up under the least stress, like poor Rose. (*Rose, is flat out and seems not to hear)*.

BELLE: Holidays can do you good, you know. Last time, with Eve, we went to Madagascar. Over there, people smile all the time, especially children, they never stop smiling.

DOUCE: Sport too, that's good for chilling out. After two hours in the gym, I feel renewed.

BLANCHE: Helps you lose weight too.

BELLE: All those smiling children. They've got nothing. As tourists, we always wanted to give them something, we would give T shirts, aspirins, the kids would smile, some would laugh in our faces, we gave only to those who didn't. Can't you see, Rose is smiling?

BLANCHE: *(worried)*: Well no, she's not smiling. She's crying.

BELLE: I'm telling you she's smiling.

BLANCHE: Stop saying that, you're making me nervous. When I'm nervous, I eat.

BELLE: Do you make yourself throw up afterwards?

BLANCHE: How do you know? The smell of vomit hangs around in my mouth. I didn't think you'd smell it. You scare me, Belle.

BELLE: (*in the tone of an agony aunt*): Dear Blanche, Thank you for having the courage to write to me. You are not alone.

BLANCHE: Stop fooling around.

DOUCE: *(same game as Belle)* You're no longer alone Blanche. Thousands of readers live like you, in anguish, because they are suffering from Bulimia.

BELLE: You need to get back to a balanced eating regime. I'm sure you can do it. It's important for your career. How can an employer possibly respect you, if you throw up in the company toilets?

BLANCHE: *(downcast)*: I'm not respectable.

BELLE: (*approaches Rose)*: She's admitted it. You see, I've avenged you.

ROSE: Avenged me from what? In what way, avenged?

Belle understands too late that she shouldn't have spoken. Hypnotised by Rose, she is unable to move. Rose throws herself at her, scratches her, slaps her. Belle screams and shouts for help. Blanche and Douce hesitate for a moment before coming to her aid.

BELLE: My face!

Blanche and Douce hold Rose down

BLANCHE: This girl is dangerous.

BELLE: My face? … Tell me!

Belle is bleeding. It's just a graze, but she is terrified.

DOUCE: It's not …

BLANCHE: *(interrupting her)*: Douce, open that drawer, there must be a first aid kit. (*approaches Belle).* We'll clean the wound.

Belle, in shock, lets herself be cared for. Blanche puts a plaster on half of her face, the plaster is disproportionately large, much more impressive than the slight wound. Blanche acknowledges to Douce that they are colluding, which the latter nods. Belle trembles.

BELLE: *(touching the plaster)*: Tell me, has my face been destroyed?

DOUCE: Seen what you've done, Rose? What's more, she came to your defence.

ROSE: Don't believe them, Belle. Words are evil, today, nothing but evil. Don't believe them!

BELLE: *(In shock)*: I'm disfigured. What man would want to make love to me?

BLANCHE: Don't think about that.

BELLE: Do you think they'd do it from behind?

ROSE: You're making her go crazy. Tell her the truth!

BLANCHE: What truth, if all words are evil?

ROSE: Since this morning, yes. But it could stop, perhaps, if I were to disappear. Douce, help me get out of here! *Douce hesitates, still holding on to Rose.* I'll resign, you'll never see me again. You'll have nothing more to fear from staff cuts. Let me go.

Blanche and Douce are about to let her go, but Belle approaches her.

BELLE: Don't you think I've a say in this?

DOUCE: Belle, you don't know what you're saying.

BELLE: I say, kill her.

DOUCE: Blanche, tell her! You've nothing on your face, Belle, just a plaster, a stupid joke. Rose hasn't done anything to you.

BELLE: It's too late.

BLANCHE: *(turning towards Douce)*: She's right, don't you understand? It's been a foregone conclusion since this morning.

BELLE: Let's tie her hands.

ROSE: No!

BELLE: Come on, Douce, think of the scouts!

They surround Rose who can no longer be seen and grab various items of office equipment.

ROSE: *(screaming)*: My eyelid!

BLANCHE: Shove post-its in her mouth, that should stop her from screaming.

ROSE: Let me go!

DOUCE: You know we can't do that anymore.

ROSE: Help!

Rose staggers, falls, tries to reach the exit.

BLANCHE: She won't get far.

BELLE: *(walks very slowly towards Rose, stretched out on the floor)*: You've nothing more to fear, Rose. There's no longer any room for doubt, my skirt is indeed red.

Blackout. When the lights come up again everything has been tidied. Douce and Belle are at their desks, made up with their hair as it was exactly at the start. Belle is no longer wearing a plaster, neither does she have a scar. Rose's desk is empty. Blanche enters.

BLANCHE: Everything's fine, I saw the Director while you were carrying her to the car park.

BELLE: Well? What did he say?

BLANCHE: He understood. He's a clever man. He said our reaction was understandable, and that maybe, he would have acted the same way in our place.

DOUCE: Do you mean that it was legitimate grounds for protecting the company?

BELLE: That's not what he said. The Group Chief Executive said that in our place, he'd have done the same thing. Well he knows what it's like when words speak evil. Didn't you explain it to him Blanche, that the words required a sacrifice, it wasn't our fault, it was in the words even before we spoke?

BLANCHE: I didn't need to say it. The Chief Executive showed me the Group's Policies and Procedures Manual. He pointed to a paragraph at the bottom of the last page, which provides for a percentage loss of seven percent.

BELLE: Human loss?

BLANCHE: Loss in workforce numbers.

BELLE: You think that's the same thing?

DOUCE: What counts, is that we were in the right. We didn't even have to carry Rose's body to the car park to make it look like the murderer went that way. The crime was provided by in the Manual.

Anyway, I never told you what happened on the evening of the great scouts' rally, did I?

BELLE: You never told anyone. But it happened. You knew at that tender age that you would never find pleasure in normal relationships – you called them "ordinary". You put an end to all that. And then this morning, Rose said a single word, and you knew that the day had come.

DOUCE: The day of my pleasure.

BELLE: I hope you're ashamed.

DOUCE: Yes.

BLANCHE: And remorse? Do you feel remorse?

DOUCE: Remorse will come eventually. When we playact the scene. But it's too early for that.

BELLE: You've never thought of taking these ex-scouts to court? I am sure they're all very respectable men now. They all pleasure themselves without taking any risks. Don't you find that unfair?

DOUCE: It's too late. You felt the same thing as me didn't you?

BELLE: When?

BLANCHE: *(to Belle)* You know very well when.

BELLE: I want her to say it. I need to hear the words.

DOUCE: With his skin under my nails.

BLANCHE: You feel a warm surge in the belly, a tremor down the spine. Your stomach tightens. A perfect mixture, a liqueur, with just the right blend of blood and acid.

BELLE: Don't forget the sweat that breaks out on your forehead.

DOUCE: The sweat that breaks out on your forehead. I never felt that.

BELLE: Don't forget how your limbs go weak.

DOUCE: My limbs go weak. My head pulses like thunder. Suns explode into fragments in my belly – his skin under my nails. Then I look into his eyes. We go from a walking pace to gallop. I think I'm screaming but I'm not screaming.

BELLE: That's exactly it.

BLANCHE: I've stopped thinking about my cellulite. I've completely forgotten about it. (*very sensually*): What a miserable body.

BELLE: I'm hungry. It's awful.

DOUSE: Why don't we eat?

BLANCHE: Do you want a meal substitute? The ones I've got are very good. There are plenty of proteins and minerals. You'd also save time.

DOUCE: To do what?

BLANCHE: I don't know, sleep tonight. Get up tomorrow. Carry on.

BELLE: So life carries on?

DOUCE: That's what she said.

BELLE: I'd like to dream, tonight. Do you think it's possible to forget it?

BLANCHE: What did she say?

DOUCE: That she'd like not to wake up.

BELLE: (*frightened)* What did you say?

DOUCE: Life carries on.

END

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